BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA

Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar

Rakesh Sinha

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION

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Publications Division
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
Government of India

2015 (*Saka 1936*)

ISBN - 978 - 81 - 230 - 1986-4
BMI - ENG - 0P - 068 - 2014 -15

© Author

Price : ₹ 180.00

Published by the Additional Director General, Publications Division,
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India,
Soochna Bhawan, C.G.O. Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi - 110 003.

Website: publicationsdivision.nic.in

Editor: Roma Chatterjee
Cover Design : G. P. Dhope

Sales Centres : • Ambica Complex, Ist Floor, Paldi, **Ahmedabad - 380007** • Ist Floor, 'F' Wing, Kendriya Sadan, Koramangala, **Bengaluru - 560034** • 'A' Wing, Rajaji Bhavan, Besant Nagar, **Chennai - 600090** • Hall No. 196, Old Secretariat, **Delhi - 110054** • Soochna Bhawan, Cgo Complex, Lodhi Road, **New Delhi 110003** • House No.7, New Colony, Cheni Kuthi, K.K.B. Road, **Guwahati - 781003** • Block No. 4, Ist Floor, Gruhakalpa Complex, M.G. Road, Nampally, **Hyderabad - 500001** • 8, Esplanade East, **Kolkata - 700069** • Hall No. 1, 2nd Floor, Kendriya Bhavan, Sector H, Aliganj, **Lucknow - 226024** • 701, B-Wing, Kendriya Sadan, CBD Belapur, **Navi Mumbai - 400614** • Bihar State Co-operative Bank Building, Ashoka Rajpath, **Patna - 800004** • Press Road, Near Govt. Press, **Thiruvananthapuram - 695001**

Typeset at : **AAR Reprographics, Lajpat Nagar-IV, New Delhi-110024**
Printed at : Sita Fine Arts Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi-110028

ABOUT THE SERIES

The objective of this series is to record, for the present and future generations, the story of the struggles and achievements of the eminent sons and daughters of India who were instrumental in our national renaissance and attainment of independence. Except in a few cases, such authoritative biographies are not available.

The series is planned as handy volumes written by knowledgeable people, giving a brief account, in simple words, of the life, time and activities of these eminent leaders. The volumes do not intend either to be comprehensive studies or to replace the more elaborate biographies.

Dedicated to
My mother
Shrimati Draupadi Devi
&
My father late
Shri Bangali Singh, a Freedom Fighter

PREFACE

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has been the matter of extensive and intense debate in India's political life and the academia. It is an undeniable fact that a comprehensive understanding of the life and ideological disposition of the founder of any organization is essential in order to truly understand the social philosophy, political outlook and culture of that organisation. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the RSS and its founder Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar are synonymous with each other.

Concurrence or dissonance with any organization and its ideology is, of course, an intrinsic part of democratic polity, but ignorance of the founder of an organization whose influence has permeated every walk of life, only gives rise to ill-informed discourse that leads in debilitating misconceptions. The result is an incomplete and even faulty evaluation of ideological movements and the journey they have traversed, much to the detriment of national life. Dr. Hedgewar's life, sadly, is a victim of many such misconceptions, many of them done deliberately. His alleged aloofness from the freedom movement is one such misconception. The facts presented here are helpful in revealing how far removed from reality such misconceptions are.

The year 1921 is cataclysmic in the history of India's freedom struggle for a host of reasons.It was in this year the Non-cooperation Movement had thrown a serious challenge to the British imperialism. The year witnessed colonial repression of Indian nationalists and Dr Hedgewar was one of them. The British government filed a case of 'sedition' against him at Nagpur for his aggressive role in the movement. And it was during the course of this trial that Dr. Hedgewar had condemned colonialism as an inhuman, immoral, unlawful and cruel form of rule and supported all forms of opposition to the British legal system, police,

administration and imperial rule. His fearless and unyielding defence of anti-colonial stance infuriated the trial magistrate to the extent that he declared Dr. Hedgewar's defence arguments as "even more seditious" than his earlier speeches. Indeed, it is because of his revolutionary activities that the colonial government had placed him in the list of "probable dangerous political criminals", a full seven years earlier! Six years before, (in 1909), Dr. Hedgewar had been accused of instigating people against the regime and hurling a bomb on a police outpost. Prior to that too, he was expelled from a school in Nagpur for boldly proclaiming "Vande Mataram" and resolutely refusing to apologize for doing so.

Dr. Hedgewar was also imprisoned for leading the Forest Satyagraha during another Gandhian mass agitation, i.e., Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. He was imprisoned for nine months for his role in the Civil Disobedience Movement. His anti imperialist remained undiminished till his last breadth on June 21, 1940, at a time when many revolutionaries, prominent among whom were Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Trailokyanath Chakravarty, were beginning to be drawn to him. In fact, Bose happened to meet him just one day before his death, owing to his sense of duty, patriotism, organizational capability and revolutionary background. One can imagine Netaji's agony on seeing Dr. Hedgewar on his deathbed.

There are innumerable instances of Dr. Hedgewar's participation in the freedom movement, but his activities and thinking were not confined to the issue of the country's freedom alone. The basic question of how and why the ancient Indian nation suffered defeat and slavery, and how this nation could again be organized and made a powerful one, bothered him continually. It was Hedgewar's firm conviction that the work done for the benefit of the nation, its reorganization and renewal was indeed a 'divine task'. And it is keeping this very purpose in mind that he established the RSS in 1925. He founded the Sangh in a remote, barren and forgotten part of Nagpur called Mohitewada; in a short span of time, it spread to all provinces of the country. More importantly, Dr. Hedgewar also strove to establish a symbiotic relationship between the organization, society, culture and the nation. Hedgewar's total

and selfless commitment to the cause of national regeneration can be gauged the fact that despite being the inspiration behind the establishment, spread and influence of the RSS, he was ever hesitant to step into the limelight. He thus became an example of how an individual ought to conduct himself in public life, eschewing self-interest and ambition.

Dr. Hedgewar had never hankered for self promotion, publicity or taking credit for any work he performed for people, society or nation. As a revolutionary he had been trained to work from background and he internalized this idealism as an integral part of his personality. As a Congress worker he performed many tasks including both as campaigns and otherwise and his attitude and temperament made him popular among his comrades as well as senior leaders. He kept himself away from publicity or demonstrating his status that even after a decade of the Sangh's founding, the provincial government of the Central Provinces continued to believe that it was Dr B S Moonje, a Hindu Mahasabha leader and a close associate of Dr Hedgewar, was the founder of the RSS! He even discouraged the writing of his biography during his lifetime. Rejecting Damodar Pant Bhat's repeated entreaties in this regard, Dr. Hedgewar said: "I am wholeheartedly grateful to you for the affection and respect you have for the Sangh and me. Your desire is that my life-sketch should be published. But I do not consider myself to be so great, or that there are such important incidents in my life that deserve to be brought to light. Also, there are no pictures of me or the programmes of the Sangh. Briefly, all I can say is that my life does not quite fit the criteria of biographies of individuals. I therefore, request you not to pursue this task."

The first small booklet about Dr. Hedgewar could be published only after his death. This was a work by V.N. Shende in 1941. Later, his life-sketch was penned by Narayan Hari Palkar two decades later. There were many articles, remembrances and Dr. Hedgewar's speeches which were published in the newspapers of the Central Provinces. However, as these had not been studied previously, many instances and events of Dr. Hedgewar's life and also his social and political outlook remained unravelled. In the political and academic worlds particularly, the one-sided discourse

has cast its shadow on the evaluation of Dr. Hedgewar's life. Questions have also been raised regarding his participation in the freedom struggle and his nationalist ideology.

As a student of Political Science at Delhi University, I first did work on Dr. Hedgewar in the form of my dissertation titled "Political Ideas of Dr K.B. Hedgewar" during 1988-89. From then, I continued my research on the topic of the participation of the RSS in the India's freedom struggle and Dr. Hedgewar's life. Amid this, I was approached by the Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, requesting me to write a biography of Dr. Hedgewar. In this book therefore, I have tried to piece together many known and hitherto unknown facets of Dr Hedgewar's life, his political outlook and worldview. Possibly, this endeavour of mine might contain some lacunae. It is my view that the evaluation of those figures that have become part of history is not all that difficult. But those extraordinary individuals, who continue to influence generations even after they have themselves passed away, and also remain relevant in the present as well as future, can be adequately evaluated only by the history of the coming ages. Dr. Hedgewar, without doubt, falls in the latter category.

Dr Hedgewar's life and mission were dedicated to cultural quest for the soul of India. He has emerged as the father of alternative ideological paradigms, symbols and inspirational substance of the country. The study, interpretation and impact of Dr Hedgewar's life and mission, therefore, cannot have a full stop.

During the course of my research in national and state archives on the RSS and the freedom movement, I came across innumerable documents and literature on both Dr. Hedgewar and RSS. These have not been properly traced and used in the academic world. This is also a reflection of the state of affairs in the Indian academic world a movement and ideology that has so powerfully influenced the society, culture and politics was wilfully ignored or neglected.

I acknowledge with gratitude the help I have received from the staff of the National Archives of India at Delhi, the state

archives of different states, the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (New Delhi), Tilak Memorial Museum (Pune), the Ratan Tata Library, the Sapru House Library, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the Director and Editorial Board of the Publications Division for their active cooperation. Besides, this work could not have been possible without the help of many thinkers and writes who guided me during completing the manuscript. It includes the veterans like late Dattopant Thengadi and K S Sudarshan.

The biography carries weight when it satisfies queries of its readers. Compliments, book reviews and critical notes all collectively help to carry out further research to theorise the vision and action of personalities who shape the destiny of society, nation and civilization. One such compliment which genuinely gave me satisfaction is by Dr Mohan Rao Bhagwat, presently the *Sarsanghchalak* of RSS, who said, "I give 9 marks out of 10". I am confident that I shall continue to receive constructive suggestions from all esteemed readers, which will certainly enable me to improve the forthcoming editions of this book. The photographs used in this volume have not been published earlier.

Rakesh Sinha

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Illustrious and Precocious Child

April 1, 1889, *Varsh Pratipada* or the first day of the Hindu calendar (*Vikram Samvat*) was a day of joy for Baliram Pant Hedgewar, an impoverished but learned Vedic scholar. His youngest son, Keshav was born on this day. The day which is considered highly auspicious in the Hindu calendar, is also celebrated in Maharashtra as '*Gudi Padwa*', that reminds every Indian of the country's history, its civilisation, cultural traditions as well as the legacy of its ancestors. The birth of any child on this auspicious day is considered to be blessing of nature. A coincidence of birth it might have been, but the new born boy went on to impart a new dimension to this auspicious date through his persona, actions, character, resoluteness, dedication and originality of thought. The boy Keshav would soon grow to be one of the architects of modern India, eventually becoming renowned as Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar.

In the normal course, any individual may attain name and fame during his lifetime; however, his name gets lost in oblivion after his death or is remembered occasionally. Dr.Hedgewar, however, remains among the fortunate few who at once span the past, the present as well as the future. Probably, this is the reason why his popularity remained undiminished and his thoughts still alive even after his death. It would be no exaggeration to say that the task that he accomplished; namely, of drawing ideal nationalism from its conceptual theology to a substantive form was perhaps the country's efforts to chart a new course. Dr. Hedgewar's message for the renaissance, reorganization and renewal of the nation remains as relevant and forceful today as it was back then, and will continue to gain its relevance even in the future.

Hedgewar Family

The Hedgewars were *Deshashtha Brahmins* and were originally inhabitants of Kundkurti, a small village in the Deccan (Hyderabad), situated at the confluence of three rivers the Godavari, Vangara and the Haridra, on the border between Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Keshav's ancestors' tradition of the study of the Vedas had a hoary past; none other than the Aadi Sankaracharya himself had anointed a member of this family as "*Dharmrakshak*" (Defender of Dharma). The family tradition of maintaining family records has made available their lineage going back till nine generations of two hundred fifty years. Keshav's great-grandfather Narhar Shastri migrated from Hyderabad to Nagpur in order to escape religious persecution under the Nizam. Successive Bhonsla rulers provided patronage to the Hedgewars for more than a century in appreciation of their Vedic scholarship. However, with the annexation of Nagpur in 1853 by the British after the death of Bhonsla ruler Raghu ji III, this patronage also came to an end. The deteriorating economic condition of the Hedgewars compelled them to take refuge in their traditional vocation of priesthood in the absence of other sustainable sources of livelihood. Their only material possession was an ancestral house. Also, the region called the Central Provinces was ravaged by famine, throwing the people of into dire straits, and concomitantly adversely affecting the livelihood of the Hedgewar family. Amidst this reign of misery, the British rulers remained extremely insensitive to their plight.

Trials and Tribulation

Keshav's mother Revati Bai was known for her innate spirituality and quiet nature and his father Baliram Pant, was a staunch believer of Vedic rituals and ceremonies. He had to shoulder the responsibility of a large family which consisted of his six children - three daughters and three sons. Keshav's elder brothers were Mahadev Shastri and Sitaram Pant, while Saru, Raju and Rangu were his sisters. Rangu was younger to Keshav. They were brought up in extreme poverty and impecunious conditions, however, their parents' affection did not let them feel its pangs. Baliram Pant, who worked strenuously, did not let his children take

up priesthood. Notwithstanding extreme financial hardships, he kept going the family tradition of the study of the Vedas. He encouraged his two elder sons to take to Vedic education. Young Keshav was also admitted in a Sanskrit school.

Keshav exhibited his reluctance to go along with traditional education. From his early childhood he showed his different temperament, not compatible to his surroundings. His parents and neighbours too realised that they had a special child among them with extraordinary faculties. Therefore, after he completed his primary education he was sent to the Neil City School of Nagpur, the oldest and most reputed public school of the Province. This was meant to be a significant thing for Keshav, but nature had more tests in store for him.

Nagpur was devastated by plague in 1902. Baliram Pant threw himself wholeheartedly into the task of performing the final rites of innumerable victims of the epidemic. Keshav's parents demonstrated an extraordinary spirit of humanity and sacrifice, which left its deep imprint on Keshav and was reflected later in his life. But alas! his parents too caught the epidemic and died. Keshav was only thirteen when he had to watch the grim spectacle of the funeral pyres of his parents on the same day.

This bolt from the blue was compounded by the fact that Keshav's family had no means of livelihood. Mahadev Shastri was saddled with the responsibility of taking care of his family after finishing his Vedic education. He sent his next brother Sitaram to Indore for further Vedic studies, in keeping with his late father's wishes. Keshav's education continued at the Neil City School, but he was now expected to assist elder brother Mahadev in his priestly work. However, Keshav's mind was not ready for this. He was moving towards greater cause. Therefore new adversities could hardly affect him. He had to be contented with one meal a day, old clothes and faced admonition and even beatings from his elder brother for his involvement in political *Akhada*. He would unhesitatingly refuse any work that he did not like. One particular incident stands out; once, his elder brother ordered him to grind *bhang* at home, which Keshav declined. He had to suffer a severe

thrashing for this but remained steadfast in his refusal. This tendency of acting according to his own unshakeable conviction, strength of will and reasoning remained with him throughout his life.

Innate Patriotism

From his boyhood his actions were unmatched with his peer group. There are interesting anecdotes of his childhood. On June 22, 1897, celebrations to mark the Diamond Jubilee of the coronation of Queen Victoria of Britain were being held throughout India. Loyalists and local administration left no stone unturned to make the day as a day of festival. As part of celebrations, sweets were distributed at Keshav's school too. He refused to accept sweets and threw them away, angrily protesting "She is not our Queen!" This was the first spontaneous spark of rebellion, witnessed in an eight year-old Keshav, which grew into a blaze in later years.

Another incident happened in 1901. British loyalists had organized a dazzling display of fireworks at Nagpur to celebrate the ascension of Edward VII (1841-1910). Young Keshav forbade his friends from visiting the fireworks site saying, "It is a matter of shame to be celebrating the ascension of an alien monarch".

The saga of valour of Chhatrapati Shivaji was part of folklore in every home in Maharashtra. At Keshav's school too, his teachers would narrate many glorious incidents of Shivaji's life. The Hindu warrior-monarch's valour, determination, and nationalist spirit left its deep mark on Keshav's mind too. The sight of the British Union Jack, fluttering over Sitabardi Fort in Nagpur (the last stronghold of the Bhonsla rulers), was a hurtful sight for the rebellious Keshav. One day, along with his friends he resolved to test Shivaji's famed guerrilla tactics, dug a two kilometre-long tunnel from the house of one Wajhe Guruji, to the Sitabardi Fort, an impossibly herculean task for twelve-year old children. They were of course, severely admonished when this endeavour of theirs came to light. It was in appreciation of such leadership abilities that his uncle Moreshwar Hedgewar (Abaji) wrote: "At an age when most boys merrily enjoyed the freedom of childhood and made

merry, this young 'commander', fired by the zeal to oust the British was confined along with his guerrilla warriors by his own family for digging a tunnel."

While on the one hand, Keshav's childhood was one of difficulties and deprivation, his own attitude and outlook was one of courage and confidence. His family was far removed from political activities or activism, and neither was Nagpur's political environment known for any anti-British sentiment. How then did patriotism spring in the young Keshav? From whence did abhorrence for and rebellion against alien rule became an intrinsic part of his character? Definitely it leads us to psychological domain to get the answer. Autobiographies and biographies of great men unravel their extraordinary sense of understanding and daring activities right in their childhood.

First Glimpse of Patriotism

Does Nature plan and create its own chosen tools to accomplish great task of human beings and universe? This question is pertinent while going through the lives of great personalities who have left their imprint on mankind. Their life-story is replete with instances which demonstrate unique and extraordinary resilience in their very childhood. Such people confront adversities in a much unperturbed manner. Dr Hedgewar's life is one such example. Young Keshav demonstrated undiminished zeal for nationalist activities, something uncommon for the children of his age.

From a very early age, Keshav's mature outlook and nationalist ambitions began to astonish people who knew him. To elder brother Mahadev Shastri, Keshav's activities appeared worthless. According to him, these tendencies were akin to "cutting off one's foot", as far as people of poor families were concerned. But as Keshav began to grow older, the burning desire to do something only grew. Such zeal enabled him to mix and mingle even with youngsters older to him.

Beginnings

Like several famous trendsetters, Hedgewar's journey of patriotism too began from the *akhada* (traditional Indian wrestling pit). The *akhada* of Shivram Guru in Nagpur was very popular among the nationalist youth who used it as an *akhada* as well as a centre for such activities, discussions, etc. Keshav frequented this *akhada* quite regularly along with his companions, prominent among whom were Moru Abhyankar, Ganesh Joshi and Hanumant Naidu. It was here in 1904 that Dr Balkrishna Shivram Moonje first saw Keshav. Dr Moonje was a man of nationalist and revolutionary temperament and among the foremost followers of Lokmanya

Tilak. While Dr Moonje liked Kehav's temperament and resolve, the latter too was influenced by Dr Moonje's warm-heartedness and selfless patriotism. This, in effect, can be said to be the beginning of Keshav's political life.

The Tilak era had just begun in the Central Provinces. Lokmanya himself visited Nagpur for the first time in 1891. The two newspapers he published, the *Kesari* and the *Maratha* were extremely popular in the Central Provinces and particularly Nagpur. Both newspapers had an important role in the dissemination of nationalist ideology. Tilak visited Nagpur again in 1902 and this time, Keshav too had the opportunity to meet him and listen to his speech. Having been a reader of the *Kesari* from a very early age, Keshav had come to develop an unshaken reverence and respect for Tilak. B.G. Khaparde in Amravati and Dr B.S. Moonje in Nagpur were the foremost proponents of Tilak's ideology.

Before the onset of the Tilak era in the country's political arena, Nagpur's own political environs were soaked in loyalty to the British Crown; nationalism was relegated to a back-seat. The extent to which this mindset prevailed can be gauged from the fact that when the Central Provinces were in the grip of a severe famine; the loyalists were shamelessly celebrating the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of the coronation of Queen Victoria. The sheer inhumanity of the British rule became apparent when despite a crushing drought; record land revenue was forcibly collected for the year 1897. A total of Rs. 97, 32,000/- was collected, which exceeded the collections for 1893-94 by Rs.22, 04,000/-.[1]

Nagpur's politics was dominated by the families of British loyalists; prominent among them were the Chitnavis and Bose families. Following the Congress second session in 1886, this was the first instance of any new political body being formed. This was named the "Loksabha", established along the lines of the *"Poona Sarvajanik Sabha"*. The newly formed body, however, had a moderate and constitutional character.

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1 D.P. Mishra; *History of the Freedom Movement in the Central Provinces;* p 198.

The saga of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, his valour and nationalism had a lasting influence on young and old alike in Maharashtra. While Shivaji's character and life left its indelible imprint upon his mind, the educative and practical teachings of Swami Samarth Ramdas (Shivaji's guru) were instrumental in shaping his thought process and channelling it towards nationalism. Samarth Ramdas' *shlokas* from the *Manobodh* were so dear to Keshav that he memorized all of them. Under Moonje's tutelage, Keshav's instincts for revolutionary change began to develop. He had learnt the art of bomb-making from his companions in 1904. These activities used to take place in Dr Moonje's house. The tremors of First Partition of Bengal in 1905 were felt in Nagpur too. Dr Moonje established an institution *"Vidyarthi Samaj"* the same year and Keshav was assigned the responsibility of organizing school students. Bhavanishankar Niyogi was made the president of this body. Keshav's enthusiastic efforts and selflessness soon endeared him to all. He was the only one among his peers to successfully collect money for the *'Tilak Paisa Fund'*, which had been set up to further the cause of the *Swadeshi* ideology and industry. The *'Arya Bandhav Veethika'* was established in Nagpur for propagating *Swadeshi* items. Among its founders was the renowned revolutionary P.S. Khankhoje. Keshav, as part of the *Veethika's* activities, used to visit various schools in order to promote the use of *Swadeshi* goods.

Bandhav Samaj

When he was sixteen, Keshav started a discussion group. This was done with an intention to engage youngsters in debates on contemporary issues and imbibe a revolutionary spirit in them. The group was recognized by the name "*Deshbandhu Samaj*", to which Bhauji Kavre rendered yeoman's contribution. An institution called the "*Bandhav Samaj*" was already active under the leadership of Kankhoje. When Keshav arrived at the Neil City School in Nagpur, a branch of the *"Deshbandhu Samaj"* [2] was opened at the school as well, creating a conducive atmosphere for

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2 Balshastri Hardas; *Armed Struggle for Freedom;* p 372.

Keshav, who was closely associated with this institution. It had two branches; one covert, and the other open for all.

Moropant Abhyankar, Jamnalal Bajaj and Bhavanishankar Niyogi belonged to the group's open branch, while Khankhoje and Keshav were leaders of its secret branch which was known by the name of *'Samarth Shivaji Samaj'*. The secret group's task was to collect weapons and coordinate the activities of armed freedom fighters operating in various parts of the Province. Its members had to take the following oath in Marathi:

Karito Sanmitr Ko Nischaye
Aaplya Pudhe Ya Panaa
Arpani Dehaas Deshkaarye Mi
Je Ruche Aapna

(O Friend! Bearing you as witness, I swear that I shall offer my body and soul in the service of my beloved motherland.)

The popularity and dedication of this revolutionary group soon went beyond the Central Provinces.

Vande Mataram Agitation

The year 1907 was a significant one for Nagpur as well as Keshav. This year saw the beginning of organized student revolt against British rule. And it was Keshav who planned it and put in action this plan.Following the 1905 Partition of Bengal, (*Banga-Bhang*), the British regime let loose a cycle of repression throughout the country. In view of the significant participation of students in political agitation, the government, in 1906, under a new circular 'Risley Circular' (named after H.H. Risley, the then Secretary to the Government of India, responsible for mooting the idea) prohibited students' participation in politics or any other agitation. The raising of slogans like *'Vande Mataram'* and *'Tilak Maharaj Ki Jai'* was made a punishable offence. Earlier, the provincial government of Bengal had issued a 'Carlyle Circular'; the Risley Circular was a modified version of the Carlyle Circular issued earlier in Bengal in October, 1905. Maharshi Aurobindo Ghosh, in his article *`True Meaning of Risley Circular'* in the newspaper *Vande Mataram* accused the imperial regime of trying to

deprive the students from joining the patriotic stream, sentiment and programmes. The regime's true intent was to weaken the anti-imperialism agitation, Aurobindo asserted.

Opposition to this Circular in the Central Provinces began from Nagpur. A school inspector visited Keshav's school for a routine inspection in September 1907. When the inspector visited Keshav's class, all students stood up and greeted him with a ringing slogan of 'Vande Mataram'. This was repeated in every class. Keshav's classmate Ganesh Govind Awade, writing about this incident, said, "The agitated inspector was red-faced with anger and went straight to the Principal Janardan Vinayak Oak and snatching his hat, left without uttering a word. Immediately after that, he wrote a strong letter to Sir Bipin Krishna Bose, Chairman of the School Managing Committee and demanded that the students should be adequately pulled up for their 'indiscipline' [3]

None of Nagpur's senior nationalist leaders, including Dr Moonje, had any inkling of any such thing. Nagpur was restive, but no one had the remotest idea that the spark lit by Keshav would set the whole of Central Provinces ablaze with anti-imperialist fire. The next day, Sir Bose addressed the students of the school and asked them to tender an apology for raising slogans. He further said, "I myself recite the '*Vande Mataram'* each night before going to bed, but the school is not the proper place for doing so. Therefore, all of you should accept your mistake by apologizing." But barely were these words out of his mouth the students stood up in unison and prompted by Keshav, let out a full-throated "Vande Mataram". Enraged, Bose issued an order asking for the dismissal of all students of Keshav's class.[4]

The school authorities had no inkling that the students had become so much polarized politically. Keshav had woven his plan in a highly secret manner right from the beginning. All the two thousand students of the school now began an indefinite strike in

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3 Ganesh Govind Awade, *Maharashtra,* July 28, 1940; p2
4 *Ibid.*

protest against the school's management committee, a strike that continued for two months.[5] Nagpur's famous Morris College too, joined the strike. Finally, the school reopened following Achyutrao Kolhatkar's mediation. The students tendered an apology after much coaxing from their parents. Keshav, however, flatly refused to apologize. He said at a meet, "If worship of my Motherland is a crime, I shall commit this crime not once but countless times over, and shall happily accept whatever punishment is meted out to me for doing so."[6]

As a result of his unrepentant attitude, Keshav was expelled from school in September.[7] Keshav, however, looked upon this expulsion to be an offering from heaven. He soon became established as a youth leader in Nagpur. In protest against this gross injustice, students began intermittently targeting government officials, Europeans and loyalists of the British Raj, ridiculing and mocking them with slogan-raising everywhere of '*Vande Mataram*'. The Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces Sir Reginald Craddock wrote to the Police Inspector-General, appraising the latter of his concern regarding the situation in Nagpur. He wrote: "I am not at all satisfied with the manner in which the police is dealing with the hooliganism of the students in Nagpur. If this continues, all our respectable people will quit Nagpur out of apprehension".[8]

First Arrest

Keshav's studies had by now suffered a gap of one year. His real education, however, lay in the language, idiom and action of revolution. He used to visit his uncle Abaji Hedgewar, a Revenue Inspector, is Rampayali all the way from Nagpur.

Keshav had immense ability to influence and organize his peers. Soon, there arose a body of his staunch supporters in

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5 Govind Ganesh Awade, *Maharashtra;* July 28, 1940; p12.
6 *Ibid.*
7 *Political Criminals Who's Who;* The Office of the Director, Criminal Intelligence; January 1914; p 97; India House, London; L.V. Paranjpe; "Dr. Hedgewar Yaancha Charitra v Kaarya"; *Kesari;* July 5, 1940; p5.
8 *The History of the Freedom Movement in the Central Provinces;* p 214-215.

Rampayali too. His first act of daredevilry could be seen in August 1908 when he hurled a bomb at the town's police station, which exploded in a pond nearby.[9] But no charge could be brought against him due to lack of any evidence. Two months later, the festival of Dashera was due, in which an item called "crossing of boundaries", used to be celebrated. Young and old, men and women were a part of these celebrations, in which an effigy of *Ravan* would be burnt. That year's "crossing of the boundary" ceremony took on an entirely different hue. Keshav's band of young activists was virtually in control of that year's Dashera festivities and made him address the huge gathering that had assembled there for the festival. Keshav of course, wasn't one to let go of an opportunity like this. He utilized this religious occasion to arouse people's political consciousness. In his fiery nationalistic address, he aroused considerable passion, imparting a new meaning to the tradition of transcending boundaries in the context of the prevailing situation:

> "Today, we are confined by many boundaries, overcoming them is our main duty. The biggest trauma and humiliation is our bondage. Being subject to another power is a crime, and it is a sin to suffer the injustice meted out by any alien powers. Therefore, in today's context, our tradition of transcending the boundary can have meaning only if we rise against foreign domination and force the British to quit our country and go back across the seven seas from where they came. Today, the real meaning of the slaying of *Ravan* is to bring about the end of the British colonial regime".

The air resonated with the cries of *'Vande Mataram'*. The police and local administration swung into action as soon as they heard about this incident. A round of repressive measures ensured in order to prevent the revolutionary spirit from spreading further. Two of Keshav's associates Dabir and Bhagore were expelled from the local school. Keshav too, was charged under Section 108 of the Criminal Punishment Code for making a 'seditious' speech, and proceedings were initiated against him. He was then arrested in

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9 *Political Criminals Who's Who;* Ibid; p97.

November.[10] But he was released on the initiative of the moderate nationalists of Bhandara district, among whom was the noted advocate Purushottam Sitaram Deo. This move also resulted in the criminal cases against him being withdrawn. Keshav, however, was forbidden from delivering any public speech at Rampayali for a year.

Brilliant Student

Through his steadfast commitment to his studies, sincerity and hard work, Keshav proved that a successful revolutionary could also be a brilliant student. Leading nationalists arranged for his education at Yavatmal's National School, run by Loknayak M.S. Aney. Keshav now began to study there under the tutelage of Loknayak Aney, at whose residence his boarding and lodging was arranged. A branch of the 'Bandhav Samaj' too now began functioning following Keshav's arrival.

Dattatreya Vishnu Apte was the principal of the school. It was natural that teachers in this nationalist school would be sympathetic to revolutionary thought and activities. It did not take long for Keshav to ignite the revolutionary spark among students of the school. In 1909, just days after Keshav's enrolment in the school, a bomb went off near Yavatmal's police outpost. The administration suspected students of Keshav's school of having a hand in this incident, but had no concrete evidence to substantiate this. A police outpost was set up near the school to keep a watch on the students. This however, made no difference to Keshav who began implementing Lokmanya Tilak's nationalist initiatives and methods in the Aney School.

The students of Keshav's school celebrated *Hanuman Jayanti* on April 5, 1909, a celebration that was almost a clarion call for revolution against British rule. Aney himself espoused the cause of fiery nationalism in his speech, which led to his lawyer's licence to practice being suspended up to March 1910.[11] The inevitable

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10 *Political Criminals Who's Who*; Ibid;p97.

11 Proceedings' File No. 162-64, Home Political 'A', National Archives of India; New Delhi;p7.

followed; the school was declared illegal under Section 16 of the CPC, 1908 and closed down.[12]

Keshav was now sent to the Samarth School at Poona, although he appeared for his examinations at the National School at Amaravati. The results showed he had passed with a high second division. The National Council of Education also issued a certificate honouring him, which bore the signature of the legendary Ras Bihari Bose. Family problems, poverty or state repression—nothing could defeat Keshav's irrepressible resolve.

12 File No.26-41, Home Political, Part 'A', June 1919; National Archives of India; New Delhi;p19.

Revolutionary Life

In the beginning of the twentieth century, revolution per se —its philosophy and action captured the minds of the educated Indians. They wanted to give the repressive and exploitative colonial regime a befitting reply by taking resort to violence. Revolutionary activities were considered by this group not only as a national imperative but also politically correct and justified. Several secret organisations sprung up from various parts of the country. Bengal was a den of such activities. Its impact and influence were felt in other provinces as well. Relations between revolutionaries in Bengal and the Central Provinces began to intensify by 1909-10. Bengal led the nation in revolting against the British, and revolutionary activists of the Central Province used to look up to their eastern counterparts to strengthen their movement in their state too. Armed freedom fighters began crisscrossing both the states.

After completing his middle exams, young Keshav began spending most of his time among these revolutionaries. When Madhavdas Sanyasi, a revolutionary from Bengal visited Nagpur, it was Keshav who was assigned the responsibility of keeping him underground. Madhavdas remained at Nagpur and its vicinity for six months before leaving for Japan. Money was collected from the province for the defence of the revolutionaries arrested in the Alipore Bomb Conspiracy. The Alipore Bomb Conspiracy is famous in our freedom struggle and also for the involvement of Aurobindo Ghosh in it.

As Kashi is to Hindus so was Calcutta for the revolutionaries. Keshav, too, wanted to visit Calcutta and be a part of the revolutionary scene there. However, he was now under police surveillance. He therefore, went under the pretext of pursuing studies. Fortunately, he had secured a high second

division in his senior matriculation (middle) examinations and was free to pursue higher studies. His interest and inclination was towards science; after completion of his middle examinations, he took up teaching at a private school to earn some money. But a city like Calcutta needed much more income than his small job could offer.

Keshav's sincerity and commitment to the cause soon won the hearts of Tilakites in the Central Provinces, and they were seriously concerned about his future. Keshav himself had never expressed any desire, nor mentioned any difficulty of any kind to anyone since his childhood. Dr. Moonje and others knew well about this particular trait of his character only too well. They, therefore, made all efforts to get him admitted to Calcutta's National Medical College so that he could reside at a lodge there and pursue revolutionary activity while continuing his studies as well. In his autobiography, Ramlal Vajpayee talking of this episode said that the actual purpose of Hedgewar in Calcutta was to gather information about the revolutionary movement there and to make himself a bridge of sorts between the revolutionaries of Bengal and those of the Central Provinces. Vajpayee writes: "Shri Keshav Hedgewar, founder of the RSS, was arranged to stay at Shanti Niketan at Calcutta's Prem Gujral Marg. Some financial help had been arranged from Shri Dadasaheb Buti, but more than his higher studies, the real purpose was to enable him to become a part of organizing the revolutionaries under the tutelage of Pulin Bihari Das (a revolutionary of Calcutta)." There was little space as Keshav had to share a room with two other students. One was Annasaheb Khaparde, son of Dadasaheb Khaparde of Amravati, and the other was Shankarrao Naik. Keshav enjoyed no luxury in either food or dwelling in his childhood or in his youth. In his later years too, he relished depriving himself of any material comfort.

The National Medical College had been established with the assistance of Dr. S.K. Mallik, Maharaja Monindra Chandra Nandi and other nationalist leaders. Students who had studied under the National Council of Education were admitted to this college, as they were barred from admission to any government medical college. Students from all over the country came to this Medical

College, which had an all-India character. Many Maharashtrian students had come to study there, along with Keshav. Among them were Y.S. Aney, Narayanrao Savarkar, Athavle, etc., who were Keshav's friends.

Police repression against revolutionaries in Bengal and particularly Calcutta was in full swing when Keshav arrived there. The government was busy identifying, banning and/or punishing revolutionary publications, organizations and individuals using Seditious Assembly Act 1907, Criminal Law Amendment Act 1908 and Indian Press Act 1910. The colonial regime was apprehending and arresting the coordinators and activists of revolutionary organizations, among whom the *Bandhav Samaj, Anushilan Sadhna Samiti* and *Atmonnati Samiti* were prominent. The number of such banned outfits was fifty. The *Anushilan Samiti*, established in 1901, was the most organized and popular revolutionary front in Bengal at that time. P. Mitra was its founder and almost all of Bengal's well-known freedom fighters were a part of the *Samiti.* Aurobindo Ghosh, Bipinchandra Pal, Trailokyanath Chakravarty, Nalin Kishore Guha, Pratul Ganguly, Jogeshchandra Chatterjee, etc., were the leading lights among the revolutionaries.

Following the ban, the *Samiti* transformed itself into a secret organization. After some of its prominent leaders were arrested, its leadership passed into the hands of school and college-going youngsters. In his autobiography *Thirty Years in Jail,* Trailokyanath Chakaravarty has written that it was owing to the mutual affection, ability to sacrifice and practice of secrecy amongst the organization's members that the *Anushilan Samiti* could continue to function despite severe government repression.

Hedgewar associated himself with the Samiti as soon as he reached Calcutta. In this regard, Chakrvarty writes: "Nalinkishore Guha, author of the well-known book *Banglar Biplab* was a student of the National Medical College when Hedgewar too studied there. It was Guha who obtained entry for Hedgewar, Narayanrao Savarkar and others".[1] Hedgewar soon made his niche in the *Samiti*

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1 Trailokyanath Chatterjee; *Thirty Years in Prison;* Alpha Beta Publication; Calcutta; 1963,p 277-78.

as a highly trusted member, and the lodge where he stayed became the centre of revolutionary activity. While underground, Shyam Sundar Chakravarty had to occasionally visit the place. The lodge also became a place of residence, hiding and store of arms for Nalinkishore Guha and his compatriots. Guha's own testimony in this regard is telling: "Hedgewar was a true revolutionary in every sense. He was known in the *Samiti* for his constructive thinking and work". Hedgewar's pseudonym among the revolutionary associates was 'cocaine'; they used the word 'anatomy' for weapons. The *Samiti's* members were sworn not to reveal any of its matters or activities to any outsiders. Total secrecy was the underlying principle in all such activities. There is a lack of concrete material as to the exact role Hedgewar had in the *Samiti,* but all prominent members associated with the group praised him. Jogeshchandra Chatterjee too, who spent 24 years in prison, has in his book accepted the fact that Hedgewar played a significant role in the *Anushilan Samiti*.[2]

During his stay in Calcutta, which lasted five years, Dr. Hedgewar emerged as a highly popular figure among the nationalist leaders and revolutionaries in Bengal.

Shyam Sundar Chakravarty had lot of affection for Hedgewar, who used to frequent his home. Like most other revolutionaries, Chakravarty's economic condition was pathetic. Hedgewar undertook a lot of effort by collecting money to alleviate the financial hardship caused by the marriage of Chakravarty's daughter. Hedgewar made it a point to regularly attend the meetings and *prabhat pheris* (early morning processions) organized by another prominent nationalist leader Maulana Liaqat Hussain. The close affinity between the two made Hussain wear the Gandhi cap instead of the Fez cap.

Hedgewar was close to people like Motilal Ghosh and Dr Ashutosh Mukherji and also came into contact with Ras Bihari Bose and Bipinchandra Pal. Highlighting aspects of his character, Hardas writes: "Hedgewar won the hearts of young revolutionaries

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2 Jogeshchandra Chatterjee; *In Search of Freedom;* p 27.

through the purity of character, commitment and extraordinary organizational capacity. There was a big retinue of patriots who held a lot of reverence for him". [3]

Hedgewar also functioned as a link between the revolutionaries of Bengal and Central Provinces. A large quantity of pistols and other small arms was dispatched from Bengal to the Central Provinces. Whenever Hedgewar used to visit Nagpur, he used to carry arms.[4]

The government of the Central Provinces admitted the fact that Nagpur's agitationists had links with the revolutionaries of Bengal. Once, Gopal Vasudev Ketkar was sent from the Central Provinces to keep a very close watch on Dr. Hedgewar. Ketkar was the government's spy and was successful in obtaining admission to Calcutta's National Medical College. But he was soon exposed and had to suffer both humiliation as well as physical attack. In Nagpur, the police twice searched the homes of Dr. Hedgewar and Dr. Moonje, but could find nothing. The government thus found itself unable to do anything about Hedgewar, although it knew everything about him.

Apart from taking part in revolutionary activities, Hedgewar also took active part in two agitations that took place in Bengal during his stay there. First he participated in the 1911 boycott of the Delhi Durbar. Then, in 1914, he was instrumental in mobilizing public opinion in a vociferous agitation against the non-recognition of the degrees awarded by the National Medical College of Calcutta.

Needless to say, it was the revolutionary fervour and activities of the students of the National Medical College that was the driving force behind the government's decision not to recognize its degree. The *Anand Bazar Patrika* criticized this stricture of the government in its editorial of November 16, 1915. Its editor Motilal Ghosh extended all possible assistance to Hedgewar and greatly strengthened his cause. Surendranath Banerji also joined this

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3 Balshastri Hardas; *Armed Struggle for Freedom*; p 373.
4 G.V. Ketkar; *Ranjhunkar;* "P.C. Khankhoje yaancha charitra"; p12.

agitation, and a huge public gathering was organized at Calcutta. Hedgewar then reached Nagpur and organized a huge rally being held in support of the Calcutta agitation, in which a resolution was passed.[5] Finally, the government had to withdraw the black law in 1916.

Despite all his activism, Hedgewar's academic excellence continued to manifest itself in the examinations. He secured 70.8 per cent marks in the examinations in September 1914, obtaining his medical degree and continuing to demonstrate his standard in studies as well. He acquired special proficiency in physiology in 1911-12, repeating the feat in 1912-13. After doing work in practical treatment, Hedgewar worked for a while in the middle of 1915 for two months at Calcutta's Victor Hospital as a trainee. The revolutionary movement in Bengal had significantly weakened by 1914-15. The government's harsh regime of repression, fissures among armed revolutionaries themselves, ideological differences and frustration at the non-attainment of their goals were the chief reasons for the demise of this particular movement. Hedgewar now returned to Nagpur as a qualified doctor. Meanwhile, the First World War had broken out in Europe. It was also an hour of trial for Indian nationalism, as also of the foresightedness of nationalists.

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5 *Hitvada;* January 12, 1916; p 7.

First World War and Dr. Hedgewar

The World War I was an event which influenced the dynamics of relationship between the British imperialism and Indian nationalists of various streams. Britain faced severe challenge in the face of the war and to sustain its dominant imperialistic position it softened its approach to the colonial people. However, it lacked honesty, it was an attempt to delude the people to solicit their support and minimize the disturbances in the colonies. It was proved after the war but Dr Hedgewar was one of those nationalists who saw through the British deceitfulness.

The Criminal Intelligence Office of the Government of India published a booklet titled "Political Criminals of India" in January 1914. Only those individuals were included in this list who were "involved in revolutionary organizations and activities" and who "knew how to make bombs and other explosives". This booklet was known as 'Book 1914' among the police and intelligence. From the Central Provinces, Dr. Hedgewar's name was included; his physical built (Dr. Hedgewar stood well over six feet in height and was of hefty built) and his activities from the days at Nagpur's Neil City School to the *Anushilan Samiti* were recorded in this booklet.

This indeed was the reason his application to serve in the medical corps of the British army, during the World War I was rejected without any explanation. The British colonial regime then was in urgent need of medical personnel. Dr. Hedgewar, along with his associates had planned to enlist themselves in the army and then create an armed uprising along the lines of the 1857 revolt against the British. This more than anything else reflects his thinking with regard to the First World War.

Hedgewar returned to Nagpur by the end of 1915. He was dismayed to find that nationalist leaders in the Central Provinces

too, like their compatriots in other parts of the country, were swayed by vague imperial promises. The colonial regime was successful in creating the impression that Britain would grant some sort of 'dominion status' to India after it won the war.

Both Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, along with their supporters, were working directly or indirectly to solicit support for Britain in its war effort. When Dr. Hedgewar came back to Nagpur at the end of 1915, he was bewildered to see local nationalists'warmth to the government. Almost all prominent Tilakites were part of the Provincial Recruiting Committee. While G.S. Khaparde was its President, Nilakanth Rao Udhoji and Dr. B.S. Moonje were its Vice-President and Secretary respectively.[1] There was a competition of sorts among people to see who would recruit more people for the forces. Moonje wrote to Mr. F.S.A. Slocock, Chief Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of the Central Province & Berar, in 1918, " I wonder why our province alone should not be able to supply us a standing reserve of well trained, able-bodied young intelligent, partially educated men, fifty or one hundred thousand in number." [2]

Dr. Hedgewar was dismayed by behaviour of the 'nationalists' towards the imperial regime, yet his self-confidence and enthusiasm did not waver a bit. He stuck to his belief that "Britain's crisis is India's opportunity". He was of the opinion that the need of the hour was to take advantage of Britain's military weakness (in terms of manpower) and an organized effort be made to completely free the nation of the colonial yoke, and began a serious dialogue with the nationalist leaders of his province. Standing steadfast on his principle of "walk alone", Dr. Hedgewar became active with resoluteness, firmly believing in the approach of "revolution instead of cooperation". His efforts found support among Nilkanth Udhoji, M.R. Cholkar, N.R. Alekar, M.S. Aney, Bhawani Shankar Niyogi and L.V. Paranjape, who began

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1 *Moonje Papers;* File No. 5, 1918-19, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi

2 *Ibid.*

hampering the government efforts to recruit youth for its war effort.[3]

While most nationalist leaders of the province were engaged in collecting money and recruiting youth for Britain's war effort, Dr. Hedgewar began ambitious efforts to garner both activists and resources from February-March 1916 onwards. Around this time, in April 1916 he briefly joined Tilak's Home Rule movement in Poona. But his fiery propagation of the idea of complete independence drew the objection of the local Home Rule Leaguers. Soon, his differences with them brought about his separation from the League.

Plan of Revolt

Hedgewar now planned to organize a revolt in the Central Provinces and for this he received active help from his childhood friend Bhauji Kavre. Both knew each other since 1908 and trusted each other and their views on most issues too, were similar. Both now began a whirlwind tour of the provinces. In order to mislead the police, they set up a cultural front called the *"Narendra Mandal",* under whose aegis meetings used to be organized. That apart, money for revolutionary purposes used to be collected during weddings and social occasions too.

Physical training centres and libraries were also set up at Nagpur and Wardha for the recruiting and training of the revolutionaries. Anna Khot in Nagpur and Harekrishna Joshi in Wardha assisted Dr. Hedgewar in this endeavour. In the selection of youngsters, their self-confidence, willingness and ability to sacrifice, courage and readiness to carry out tasks, obedience were the chief attributes that were considered. Once, three youngsters were ordered to jump into a well. One was ready while the other two dithered. People chosen for revolutionary tasks were given the biographies of Mazzini, Joan of Arc, Shivaji's accomplishments, Savarkar's *Indian War of Independence* and the stories of the revolutionaries of Bengal to read, as part of their ideological

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3 *Hitvada;* June 29, 1918; p 7.

training. Dr. Hedgewar wished to raise an army of revolutionary youngsters, infused with an indomitable will and trained in all aspects of nationalism. He had seen at first hand the revolutionary movement in Bengal, and also knew very well the reality that many revolutionaries, who had initially jumped into the fray out of raw emotion; soon quit the movement following even a little repression, initial failure or ideological differences with fellow-revolutionaries. Hedgewar, on the other hand, was successful in raising a band of 150 committed activists in the Central Provinces, trained in all aspects. Nanasaheb Talatule and Bahusaheb Talatule handled their training. Nansaheb Telang, Gangaprasad Pandey and Wamanrao Dharmadhikari were the prominent leaders of the revolutionary group, who were used by Dr. Hedgewar for different purposes.

Babasaheb Talatule handled the training of pistol-shooting, while Dharmadhikari was dispatched to Goa and other places to garner arms. Gangaprasad Pandey was dispatched to northern India along with twenty revolutionaries. He made Ajmer in Rajasthan his centre of activity. The well-known nationalist of that place, Chand Karan Sharda helped Pandey a lot. A senior advocate of Nagpur, V.V. Kelkar was also associated with this group. In fact, it was he who had introduced Balaji Huddar to this group. Huddar named this the "Secret Conspiracy Group".[4] Nanaji Puranik and Baburao Puranik of Wardha toured the state, making contact with youngsters. Dr. Hedgewar and Bhauji Kavre used to administer the oath of sacrificing one's everything for the cause of the nation's freedom to newly recruited youngsters, citing the example of Shivaji and Samarth Ramdas.

Meetings of the revolutionary youth used to take place at Tulsi Bag, Colonel Bag, Mohitewadi and inside temples in Nagpur. Different means were employed to collect arms. Wamanrao Dharmadhikari and Telang were sent to Goa towards the end of 1917 to buy pistols. In the beginning of 1918, youngsters of this revolutionary group disguised as soldiers, ambushed a train

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4 Balaji Huddar; "The RSS and Netaji"; *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, 7-13 October, 1979; p 23.

leaving Nagpur and stole a trunk containing ammunition. Dr. Hedgewar had specially selected a few youngsters, who looted arms on many an occasion, wearing female disguise.

Dr. Hedgewar was successful in establishing contact with revolutionaries. Many revolutionaries of the *Anushilan Samiti* in Bengal were in touch with him. Arms and money collected in Nagpur were dispatched wherever needed.

Meanwhile, Britain had gained an upper hand against Germany in the First World War and the colonial administration in India turned its attention to crushing the revolutionary movement. Dr. Hedgewar hoped for cooperation from Lokmanaya Tilak. He wrote to Dr Moonje and then proceeded to meet him at Poona, staying with him for two days.[5] He wished that a proclamation of India's complete independence be made in many other parts of the world, along with carrying out a revolution at home. There is no tangible proof to corroborate whether Dr. Hedgewar had any contact with Indian revolutionaries who resided and worked abroad. Possibly, he might have established contact with revolutionaries of the Ghadar Party. Tilak, however, dismissed Dr. Hedgewar's proposal as impractical.

On the other hand, despite all precautions, the attitude and behaviour of some members of his revolutionary group aroused suspicions in Dr. Hedgewar. According to Balaji Huddar, Gandhian ideas had begun to enter the revolutionary group and it was now dividing itself into two groups.

Dr. Hedgewar had now resolved to destroy all traces of his preparations for a revolutionary uprising, before his plans could be discovered, evidence of it fell into the hands of the police. He did not want innocent patriots, particularly those loyal to the cause, to be captured and suffer at the hands of the imperial regime. Revolutionaries were first summoned from the respective centres they had been sent to and then the process of destroying arms and ammunition too was carried out. Appaji Joshi and other confidants

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5 *The Gazette of Maharashtra State;* Nagpur Division; 1966; p 113.

assisted him in this important task. One can imagine Hedgewar's agony at having to undo all the hard work of the past three years, especially destroying all the arms collected and disbanding the patriotic and committed revolutionaries so assiduously trained by him and his colleagues. Yet, he maintained his composure even in this hour of grief.

Any compromise with imperialism or relenting even a bit towards it was anathema to Dr. Hedgewar. The underlying basis of his loyalty to any individual or organization was only one—his or its willingness to sacrifice for the motherland, its support for complete independence and selfless service to the nation. It was for this reason he had the utmost respect for Lokmanya Tilak. Throughout Tilak's six years imprisonment, he adhered to *Ekadashi vrata* (a fast kept on the eleventh day of each fortnight) for Tilak's well—being. He was also intolerant of any criticism of Tilak.

Yet, during the First World War, Hedgewar amply proved the fact that he was no blind worshipper of individuals, but a supporter of their actions in the interests of the nation. In this regard, the dialogue between Hedgewar and one of his childhood friends Govind Ganesh Awade throws light on the former's values. Awade, inspired by Tilak's writings in the *Kesari* had enlisted himself in the British Indian army.

Hedgewar told him, "You received this training to fight a battle for Britain. Your training has nothing to do with the interest of our own country. Had you gone to the war front and unfortunately died there, it would not have been martyrdom for the motherland, but an unholy act of strengthening British imperialism." Awade pleaded that he had "just obeyed his revered leader Lokmanya Tilak" to which Dr. Hedgewar pensively replied, "Even a suggestion by Lokmanya should be accepted only after giving it due thought." [6]

Indeed, the metamorphosis in Tilak's views, particularly on the issue of the First World War, melted Hedgewar's firm faith in

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6 Govind Ganesh Awade, *Maharashtra,* 28th July, 1940, p.12.

him and "his long established admiration for Lokmanya also diminished." [7]

Though Dr. Hedgewar's plan for an armed revolution did not materialize, his evaluation of imperialism and analysis of the imperial war proved accurate. Throughout his life, he continued to firmly reject any approach of compromise with the imperialist leadership or its methods.

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7 D.V. Kelkar; "The RSS"; *The Economic Weekly,* February 8, 1948.

Self Awakening

Keshav's family was overjoyed when he returned to Nagpur towards the end of 1916, after completing his medical studies at Calcutta. The economic condition of his family was no different than what they were when Keshav had set out for Calcutta six years ago. Priesthood was still the means of subsistence for them; his elder brother Sitaram Pant somehow managed to keep the family going. Against this backdrop, a member of the family becoming a qualified doctor was a matter of great happiness.

When Hedgewar returned from Calcutta, there were only 75 medical practitioners in the entire Central Provinces & Berar, far less for the huge population of the state and it was not difficult at all for any new medical practitioner to prosper. But Dr. Hedgewar, despite his family's economic plight, did not lose sight of his principal objective in life. One can imagine how difficult it would have been for any sensitive and conscientious individual to steadfastly devote his time, energy and talent for the interests of the nation and not to earning a livelihood for oneself and one's family, despite knowing only too well their financial circumstances. Undeniably, it is the boundless love for one's nation, which pervades such individuals. Dr. Hedgewar's unwavering decision did not alienate him from his family, on the contrary, endeared him to them more than before. The underlying nationalist feeling among his family members placated them not to raise any objection to his mission. In this regard, Amrendra writes, "any lack of materialistic wealth was fulfilled by richness of hearts." [1]

1*Kaal*, 24th June 1940.

The self-introspection of any individual's life may also be termed as self-realization. An individual realizes his self and evaluates himself, after which materialism holds no attraction to him. He is then able to decide his course of life. Dr. Hedgewar too, went through this phase of self-introspection and his decisions were based on self-realization of his own free will. He never acquired learning or training in spiritualism from any religious *math* or *guru.* One who is an original thinker and a person of high ideals and extraordinary willpower always finds new ways, roles and a new philosophy for himself.

Dr. Hedgewar had now dedicated himself to the national cause, observing complete celibacy. This decision of his was sternly opposed by his family, causing much surprise and consternation at home. Pressure began building up from both family and friends to get married, but he had already chosen his path. Efforts to make him reconsider, however, continued in right earnest. Right from Dr. Moonje to his uncle 'Teerth swaroop' Abaji Hedgewar, [2] everyone implored him to reconsider the extreme nature of his sacrifice, but had to bow to Hedgewar's constructive thinking and positive resolve.

Hedgewar's eldest brother Mahadev Shastri passed away sometime in 1916, becoming a victim of plague that ravaged Nagpur. Sitaram Pant was married in 1917. Following this, Keshav's uncle Abaji Hedgewar wrote a long letter to Keshav, asking him to reconsider his decision. Abaji wrote: “One can serve the nation even as a married householder. Presently, there are innumerable examples of such patriots before us. Far from being an obstacle, marriage is an important personal commitment and fulfils a certain purpose in life and indirectly helps the cause of the nation. It provides a balance to one's life. Raising a family is as important a responsibility as serving the nation.”

Hedgewar was very close to his uncle Abaji. In fact, Abaji had to lose his government job because of his nephew's nationalist fervour and activism. When Dr. Hedgewar faced trial at Rampayali

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2 Dr. Hedgewar used to address his uncle as 'Teerthswaroop' in his correspondence to him.

in 1908 for 'sedition', Uncle Abaji too had to endure the government's ire and was dismissed from his job. Abaji was not sad at losing his job, nor did he object to his nephew's extreme nationalism. His sacrifice and his constant support for Hedgewar naturally lent him a moral authority over Keshav. Keshav, however, was not in the least perturbed upon receiving his uncle's letter. His decision was not influenced by momentary impulses or the external world, but rather by a calm mind and the challenges that lay ahead, and his mission for the nation. In his reply to Uncle Abaji, Keshav laid out the justification for his "well thought" decision: "My decision not to marry has been a well-thought one. I do not wish to involve myself in family life and the worries of earning a livelihood. I am absolutely guided by my inner spirit of serving the nation with all my energy. I wish to see the nation free of foreign domination. For this, I am open to both non-violent as well as violent means. The cycle of foreign domination is not new to India. But why does this occur? This is the question that agitates my mind".

"If we are under servitude today, it is because of our cowardice. We lack the consciousness of a nation, undiluted nationalism and the sense of a single brotherhood. It is for this reason alone that a handful of Britons are able to easily enslave and rule a country of millions. It is not only the revolutionaries who are being persecuted; even Mahatma Gandhi's followers are being made to suffer. A nonviolent activist like Pandit Arjun Lal Shethi too has been subjected to inhuman treatment in prison."

"A question often arises in my mind can we not defeat the British? And I perceive that the answer to this query lies in sacrificing everything for the nation. My mind, body, intellect and soul resonate with but one consciousness. If we organize the nation, spread nationalism and work to dispel the sense of inferiority among people, there can be no greater cause and purpose to our own lives."

"It is true that Narayanrao, Vinayakrao Savarkar, Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and other patriots have worked tirelessly for the nation. But my own constitution is different. I am not able to gather myself for a married life. I am conscious all the while, of my

social and political responsibilities and cannot divide my heart, body and soul. I do not wish to make any woman wait endlessly for me at home after getting married, nor have any desire to engage myself in social pursuits after leaving emptiness at home There is no conflict in my mind today. I am firm in my decision, which is in keeping with my nature."

Hedgewar's family, friends and social compatriots ultimately came around to accept his decision to stay unmarried. Dr. Hedgewar found joy in leading a life of renunciation; he did not start any new sect nor led a life of a *sanyasi*, though. He remained very much active in society and grappled with the realities, contradictions and problems of life.

Thus Hedgewar imparted a new turn to his public life, a positive commitment that was to remain with him to his last breath. Through innumerable platforms, ways and methods, Hedgewar committed all his energies in the service of the nation and was also honoured and respected in equal measure, as he himself was of an upright character. After his passing away, *Kesari* in an editorial wrote about him: "Despite being thoroughly qualified for practicing medicine, his decision not to enter this profession or get married was driven purely by his commitment to the service of the nation, a commitment that he upheld throughout his life". [3]

Test of Patriotism

Hedgewar thoroughly disapproved of his introduction in public meetings as a patriot. Once, at a public meeting, when he was introduced as a 'great patriot', he said, "Such introduction is demeaning. How would I feel if I am introduced as "a human being"? Wouldn't that be insulting? Is it necessary to highlight the fact that one is a human being? Will people not understand that we are humans, if we don't specifically say so? Similarly, when we say "someone is a patriot", does it not amount to that we are not patriots ourselves? One is a born patriot, or must be one."

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3 *Kesari,* 25th June, 1940.

Dr. Hedgewar had similar rebukes for those singing the tune of patriotism publicly. Commenting on this trait, he said, "I think this habit is to be found only in our country. One cannot imagine such empty-headed habits in any other nation. Patriots are born, not made. The meaning of patriotism is understood by a person right in the lap of his or her mother. Patriotism is not a subject of discussion or interpretation. It is beyond all disputes and debates and is self-proven". Dr. Hedgewar was against dividing the people into patriots and non-patriots. He was of the view that every individual is committed to the nation according to his capability and consciousness. This is a common trait; what is uncommon is "treachery to the nation", and it is necessary to unmask the few who are treacherous.

Dr. Hedgewar elucidated a ten-point criteria of patriotism, which briefly was:

1. The meaning of patriotism is an apparent affection and love towards the motherland and the society to which one is born.
2. Patriotism means love of the heritage, culture and apparent pride for the society in which we are born.
3. Sincerity, based on reason, to values of life which have been evolved by our society.
4. Power that energizes the upliftment of our society and inspires us to sacrifice everything for its development.
5. Pious flow of self-less social life.
6. Abandoning all desires of luxury and devoting oneself to the society.
7. Bequeathing individual hopes and desires for the society.
8. Sweet fragrance of unselfish and duty-bound life dedicated to the nation.
9. Patriotism is the lotus emerging from the navel of the society, like *Brahma* the Creator.
10. Patriotism is the kindling of the spirit of integrity of the society as a whole.

It is on these criteria that Dr. Hedgewar worked tirelessly throughout his life.

An Encounter with the Congress

After witnessing at close quarters the failure of the revolutionary movement, Dr. Hedgewar's attention now turned to organized mass movement. He now became a member of the Congress and began the task of public awakening through its platform. Lokmanya Tilak's followers held sway over the Congress in the Central Provinces, and they worked under the aegis of an institution called the '*Rashtriya Mandal*', established by Nilkanth Udhoji in 1907. All prominent followers of Tilak were associated with the *Mandal*, noteworthy among whom were Dr. Moonje, Dr. N.B. Khare, Vishwanathrao Kelkar, Gopalrao Buti, Dr. L.V. Paranjpe, Narayanrao Kelkar and others. The government had banned the *Mandal* in 1909, but the ban was withdrawn during the First World War.

Upon his return from Calcutta to Nagpur, Hedgewar was admitted to the *Rashtriya Mandal.* According to D.V. Kelkar, he and Dr. Hedgewar were 'associate members' of the *Mandal.*[1] But Dr. Hedgewar thoroughly disagreed with the political ideology of the *Mandal* and its outlook regarding Mahatma Gandhi. The *Mandal* no longer retained its earlier shrill anti-imperialist stance, but had become obsequious to the British crown. The earlier ban on the *Mandal* was lifted and it was revived for this very reason. As a result of these differences, Dr. Hedgewar formed the Nagpur National Union (NNU) in mid-1919 along with several members of the former *Rashtriya Mandal*. N.B. Khare, Vishwanatahrao Kelkar, Balwantrao Mandlekar, Manohar Pant, Bobade, Chorghade and others from the *Mandal* joined the Nagpur National Union. There

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1 D.V. Kelkar; "The RSS"; *The Economic Weekly,* February 4, 1950, p.132.Kelkar was a renowned journalist and was associated with the RSS during its early years, but left it in later years following differences of opinion.

were two chief differences between the *Mandal* and the Union. While the *Mandal* was involved in day-to-day politics, the Union was kept away from it. The *Mandal* remained silent on the question of 'complete independence' while the chief purpose of the Union was to propagate the demand for complete independence. While founding the Union, Dr. Hedgewar said, "It is pathetic that nationalists have been unable to distinguish between India's interests and that of the imperial rulers. If the British are so benevolent why have they kept us enslaved? The present politics is beset with many lacunae and a collective effort is needed to overcome them".

In December, 1919, when the government appealed to the people to observe a 'Peace Day' to mark Britain's victory in the First World War, the Nagpur National Union stridently opposed the move. Instead, it observed a 'Protest Day'. It issued counter-leaflets saying, "Can we celebrate peace?" The Union now steadily grew in popularity among the youth of Nagpur.

Sankalp

As his activity grew in the Congress, so did the responsibilities assigned to him. The Central Provinces consisted of fourteen Hindi-speaking districts and four Marathi-speaking ones. But the Congress did not have a single Hindi newspaper or journal. A three-member committee of the Congress decided in favour of bringing out a Hindi fortnightly *Sankalp*. All district units were informed of this through a circular on February 1, 1919. Dr. Hedgewar was assigned the onerous responsibility of garnering subscribers to this proposed journal and collecting advance subscription for three years. Dr. Hedgewar made a tour of the entire province. The collection of subscriptions for the new venture was a difficult task, as the launch of new publications and their subsequent closure was a usual feature in the Provinces. It was difficult to convince people to have faith in yet another publication. Hedgewar wrote to Dr. Moonje about his experience in this regard: "People do not like to give advance subscription, and that too for

three years. The reason for this is that in the past, funds collected for 'public purposes' could not be utilized properly".[2]

Despite these difficulties, Hedgewar was successful in collecting more than the amount expected of him through his reasoning, and hard work. He collected forty subscribers at Khandwa, twenty at Sagar and thirty in Damoh. On April 2, he sent Rs. 500 and on 25th April he sent another Rs. 600 to Dr.Moonje. In a period of three months, he toured remote villages of the Provinces, often not meeting even a single person at many places. Yet, he was able to attract a thousand subscribers.[3] At many places like Narkhed and Patan, Hedgewar had to travel for hours in bullock cart to reach them. While his popularity grew because of the success of his effort, Hedgewar also got an opportunity to meet political, social and cultural activists, as well as those for whom patriotism was a hobby, and also got to understand them fairly well. The questions, circumstances, environment and the instances he encountered enabled him to understand the ground reality of the local Congress organization as also the shortcomings prevalent in public life. In the early years of his political life, Dr. Hedgewar had lived mostly among revolutionaries and was not much in touch with the peculiar practical side of the public life. In a letter to Dr. Moonje, Hedgewar reminiscenced thus: "Congressmen are good orators who impress people in the first meeting but their impact on people's minds vanishes in two or three days. They are busy in their pursuit for money and don't have time for public work".

It was Dr. Hedgewar's studied perception that the Congress had paid scant attention to the political training of its cadres. Citing the example of a Congress worker Majumdar Vakil in another letter, Hedgewar drew attention to a peculiar trait of Congressmen that "they wish to get service done through others but are not prepared to do it themselves". Hedgewar held a meeting at Brahmpur, which

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2 *Moonje Papers*; Hedgewar to Moonje, 24th Feb., 1919; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library; New Delhi.

3 *Moonje Papers*; Personal Diary; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library; New Delhi.

was attended among others, by 11 advocates who were also office-bearers of the Congress in different capacities. None of them had any worthwhile knowledge of contemporary political developments and trends. Dr. Hedgewar also drew Dr .Moonje's attention to another shortcoming of the Congress organization, quoting an incident at Harda to drive home his point. When he met Dr. Salpekar, a Congress leader there, the latter told him to "leave immediately by the very next train, as he was under police surveillance". However, Dr. Hedgewar received more assistance and cooperation from lesser known people than these more fancied post-holders in the organization. Salpekar chickened out of helping Hedgewar in any manner whatsoever, but the secretary of the local Home Rule League Shankar Pant fearlessly helped him.

Dr.Hedgewar's experiences in this mission also proved to be his political education, which he put to good use in later years in his public life.

Congress Session

The 20th Congress Session in December 1920 was slated to be held at Nagpur, which was a matter of pride for Nagpur. Earlier, the Congress Session of 1907 was to have taken place in the city, but an inevitable clash between the followers of Tilak and the Congress had necessitated the postponement of that session. This session had assumed importance for many reasons. The brief truce between nationalists and imperialists during the First World War had now ended, and the Congress was gearing up for struggle. At the special session organized at Calcutta in 1920, a resolution had been passed for launching Non-cooperation Movement.

The other important and talked-about event was the absence of Tilak. The Lokmanya's passing away on August 1, 1920 had ended Tilakites' hopes. They had wished to make him the Congress president. Mahatma Gandhi had by then been established as the *numero uno* in Indian politics. The Nagpur Session of the Congress faced its biggest dilemma who would be the next president of the party?

The Nagpur National Union made an initiative in this regard. In the first week of August, Dr. Hedgewar put forward a proposal to make Aurobindo Ghosh the next president of the Congress, which was accepted unanimously by the Union. The Provincial Congress too, later voiced its agreement to Dr. Hedgewar's proposal. He was then the Joint Secretary of the Congress Nagpur unit. And it was on Dr. Hedgewar's request that Dr. Moonje and he travelled to Pondicherry in August to meet Maharshi Aurobindo, who lived there as a *sanyasi* since 1910.

Both leaders implored Aurobindo to return to active politics and take over the reins of the Congress, but Aurobindo was steadfast in his refusal to do so. After repeated requests, Aurobindo wrote to Dr. Moonje on August 30, 1920, expressing his inability to do so. Dr. Hedgewar roped in others too, to send letters and telegrams to Aurobindo, to make him reconsider his decision, but on September 1920, the saint finally replied "reconsidering is out of question".

Dr. Hedgewar was also a member of the Reception Committee for the Congress Session. The provincial Congress suggested the names of Aurobindo Ghosh, Vijayaraghavacharya, Chiitaranjan Das, Mohammad Ali and the revolutionary Shyamsundar Chakravarty for the post of Congress president.

Vijayaraghavacharya's candidature drew support from Punjab, Bihar, Delhi, and Dr. Moonje. The whole of Central Provinces had 550 representatives. The Reception Committee of the party held its meeting in Nagpur on October 10, 1920, in which Dr. Hedgewar opposed Vijayaraghavacharya's name for president. His opposition was both in principle as well as emotional. Hedgewar revealed that when the country was seething with rage at the Jallianwala Bagh atrocity and the colonial regime, Vijayaraghavacharya had attended a tea party at the invitation of the Governor of Madras. "How can a person who cannot empathize with the nation's feelings, nor understand the true nature of imperialism become Congress President?" he argued.

Dr. Hedgewar stuck to his principled stand despite Dr. Moonje's efforts to convince him. He believed that the Congress

President should be a spotless person, "one whose integrity no one could dare question. He proposed the name of Shyam Sundar Chakravarty, but the majority was with Dr. Moonje. Finally, it was Vijayarahvacharya's name that was sent to the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) for the post of party president.

Behind Dr. Hedgewar's opposition to Vijayaraghavacharya lay the question of principled stand. The latter did not agree in entirety to the concept of non-cooperation. He was opposed to involving students in political movements. Some young members of the Reception Committee supported Dr. Hedgewar's stand, and many newspapers supported him by in their editorials. The *Sandesh*, published from Bombay said that the majority support within the Congress for Vijayaraghavacharya was unfortunate and wrote: "An unworthy person has become the president of the Congress".[4] Maharashtra too, opposed Vijaraghavacharya's candidature. His speech at the Congress Session only confirmed Dr. Hedgewar's suspicions about him. Vijayaraghavacharya, in his presidential address questioned the boycott of courts, schools and colleges. The *Indian Review* wrote that the Congress president delivered a speech full of contradictions.[5] Another newspaper *Janmabhoomi* commented: "We are unable to fathom whether the Congress president has spoken in favour of the Non-cooperation Movement or has opposed it".

However, once Vijayaraghavachrya was elected as Congress president, Hedgewar did not allow his opposition to him obstruct preparations for the Congress session. He was assigned important responsibilities, as a member of the Volunteer Committee, Sanitation Committee and Topics Committee. It had the onerous responsibility of managing the session, its food and lodging arrangements and the smooth conduct of the session. The Volunteer Committee had Dr. L.V. Paranjape. Other members of the committee were: Dr. K.B. Hedgewar, Harkare and D.V. Deshmukh. Hedgewar was the youngest among them and

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4 Republished in the October 20, 1920 edition of the *Maharashtra*; p 4.
5 *Indian Review;* January 1921; published from Madras; p36-37.

voluntarily worked as a full-time worker. The chief responsibility therefore, fell on him. He recruited and trained 1,200 volunteers who successfully managed the Nagpur session, one of the biggest sessions of the Congress till then. Thirty thousand people participated in the session, of which twenty thousand were delegates. The Nagpur Congress session saw the emergence of Dr. Hedgewar as a capable organizer and the accolades received by the Volunteer Committee were in fact, entirely due to his skills, capability and efforts. Yet, he did not use his newly-won fame or accolades for grabbing any post in the party, but preferred to work quietly as a grass root worker.

In the meeting of the Subject Committee, Dr. Hedgewar put forth a parallel proposal to redefine the goal of the Congress. The draft resolution moved by him stated: "The object of the Congress is to establish Indian Republic and liberate the nations of the world from the tyranny of capitalist exploitation". Hedgewar's resolution was not accepted in the Congress, but he was successful in linking India's freedom struggle with all nations that had fallen under the sway of imperialism and were being exploited and subjected to colonial rule. The *Modern Review* took note of his proposal and commented: "But the proposed resolution, which excited laughter among serious-minded people, deserved a better fate than what it met with in the Subject Committee." It further wrote that the Reception Committee of the Nagpur Congress session had "people of republican character'. [6]

At the conclusion of the Nagpur Congress session, Dr. Hedgewar had begun to be counted among the important political leaders of the Provinces. In April 1921, he was selected in a 12-member "Tilak Swarajya Fund" formed in the Central Provinces. He was then chosen for the Nagpur District Congress in May. His growing popularity can be gauged from his role in the Non-Cooperation Movement.

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6 Ref: *Modern Review*, *Ibid.*

A Non-Cooperator

Non-cooperation Movement was the first major Gandhian Indian agitation. The passing of the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of innocent Indians outraged the entire nation. People were seething with rage. The boycott of courts, colleges and councils (the legislature), returning government awards and certificates and peaceful opposition of the regime were the chief programmes of the Non-cooperation Movement. The movement witnessed participation of all the communities even those who had hitherto remained generally aloof from such agitations.

The Indian Muslims were offended with Britain for the treatment meted out to the Caliph of Turkey, who was deposed after Turkey's defeat and the Ottoman Empire's decline following the war. The Caliph of Turkey was hitherto looked upon as the religious leader of Muslims worldwide and Indian Muslims too, identifying with this, had both sympathy and support. Indian Muslims were agitated over the Caliph's removal and began agitating in India in his support. Gandhi saw in this an 'ideal' opportunity to expand the social base of the struggle. He sought to enlist the cooperation of the Muslims in his Non-cooperation Movement. His motive behind this move was to forge a sense of brotherhood amongst Hindus and Muslims. It led an acrimonious debate among nationalists.

The Swaraj Party was dominant in the Central Provinces and it expressed many reservations and doubts with regard to the Non-cooperation Movement. In fact, one of the prominent Swaraj Party leaders B.G. Khaparde even wrote to Mahatma Gandhi saying, "If you expect that accepting your principles, I should support the Non-cooperation Movement, I must say that I am unable to do so". Even Dr. Moonje made public his objections to the Movement.

They believed that Mahatma Gandhi was trying to expand the movement by taking recourse to Muslim appeasement. There was a serious doubt over the effectiveness of the movement in the Marathi-speaking areas of the Central Provinces. In brief, Tilakites who dominated the province were not enthused by the Gandhian action.

Although Dr. Hedgewar too had reservation with Gandhi's approach to exploit the Caliph's issue, he did not endorse Tilakites's cold shoulder to the movement. He understood the significance of the opportunity and broke the fetters of ghetto politics. He believed that any compromise, whatsoever, with imperialism or even sympathizing with it were a betrayal of nationalism.

He along with M.R. Cholkar, Salimulla Khan and other associates altered the scenario in the Provinces. The Non-cooperation Movement received unexpected and unprecedented support in Nagpur and other Marathi-speaking areas of the province. Dr. Hedgewar, on his part, showed farsightedness in analyzing the national situation, quite detached from his personal and social moorings. Keeping in view his later activism, one can well gauge his serious objections at linking support for the Khilafat movement to the wider national movement, but there is no evidence of Hedgewar ever airing his objections publicly. He had but one standard for being active in any organization or movement it had to be opposed to imperialism. His reasoning compelled him to wholeheartedly participate in the Non-cooperation Movement and in this; he disregarded the prevalent political circumstances around him and also the views of outspoken and aggressive Tilakites. This is what is meant by independent will, resolve and vintage patriotism. His query was: "Is it possible to remain aloof from the anti-imperialist struggle owing to personal or ideological differences?" It was because of such reasoning that Dr. Hedgewar had no hesitation in expressing his respect for Mahatma Gandhi and accepting his leadership. He had but one clear purpose, i.e., every opportunity and every method ought to be utilized for strengthening nationalism and weakening imperialism. If one were to go by the definitions prevalent in the political milieu of Dr Hedgewar's time, from being a Tilakite earlier, he had begun to turn an advocate of Gandhism.

Dr. Hedgewar's public life, political thought, philosophy and policies were not determined on the narrow bases of Tilak versus Gandhi, violence or nonviolence, the Congress or the revolutionary movement. The goal of the attainment of complete independence was paramount in his political life, rather than the adherence to any particular individual or political stream. He believed that all nationalist leaders, institutions and movements complemented each other and all nationalists ought to cooperate with each other, eschewing bias and setting aside ideological differences.

One instance particularly stands out and deserves to be mentioned. When a proposal condemning armed freedom-fighters was moved in the provincial Congress in 1921, it was Dr. Hedgewar's firm and unbending opposition to it that resulted in it being dumped. That particular meeting was presided over by Lokmanya Aney, who later wrote: "Dr. Hedgewar could in no way tolerate the condemnation of revolutionaries as he considered them to be honest patriots. One could differ with the means they adopted, but no one had any right to question their patriotism". There were many such instances in Hedgewar's life that prove that he was neither a Tilakite nor a Gandhian. If anything, he believed in the freedom of the country.

When an individual imbibes patriotism with a pure mind and selfless dedication, history too bows to him at every turn. Dr. Hedgewar, now proceeded to change the very face of politics in Nagpur and the Marathi-speaking regions of the Central Provinces.

Nagpur National Union

Dr. Hedgewar's participation in the Non-cooperation Movement was not the result of any impulsive action, but a well-considered step. In Nagpur, he had engaged the Englishmen in a lengthy debate on non-cooperation. A committee had been formed on August 18, 1920 to organize a public function on this issue. It comprised Dr. Cholkar, Manohar Pant Bobabde, R.N. Padhye and Vishwanathrao Kelkar. This committee finalized the programmes to be held under the aegis of non-cooperation and put forth the same at the Congress special session to be held at Calcutta

(September 1920). Dr. Hedgewar was present at the Calcutta session and was one of the supporters of the Non-cooperation Movement from the Marathi-speaking regions of the Central Provinces. This is ample evidence of the fact that anti-imperialist feelings had begun spreading at the local level and in its institutions in a spontaneous manner. Mahatma Gandhi had in fact lent a national dimension to it through this Movement.

Even before the Congress had announced its decision to launch the Non-cooperation Movement, the Nagpur National Union had begun highlighting it in the Marathi-speaking areas of the Central Provinces. The Union's leaders organized public meetings at every nook and corner of Nagpur and began the concept of non-cooperation in people's hearts and minds. [1]

Non-Cooperation Committee

A Non-cooperation Movement Committee was established under Dr. Hedgewar by the Marathi-speaking areas of the Central Provinces. Its purpose was to prepare workers intellectually, mentally and physically for the Non-cooperation Movement. The committee used to organize training classes regularly. Trainee workers had to bear their own expenses for boarding and lodging. Despite this, hundreds of youngsters enlisted for training under this committee. The Nagpur Non-Cooperation Committee celebrated a 'Non-Cooperation Week' from November 11, 1920, during which Dr. Hedgewar addressed dozens of meetings at many places. In 1921, his public meetings, demonstrations and tour on non-cooperation gained momentum.

In Nagpur, prominence was given to campaign against alcoholism in the non-cooperation programmes. In meetings organized during January-February 1921, Dr. Hedgewar's chief stress used to be on this very subject.[2] Through this move, Dr. Hedgewar wished to target the revenue earned by the government of the Central Provinces. He was successful in organizing the picketing of government liquor shops and encouraging people to

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1 *Maharashtra,* May 19, 1940; p5.
2 *Maharashtra,* February 2, 1921.

give up drinking. The provincial government had to endure significant loss of revenue.

On February 22, 1921, Dr. Hedgewar announced at a public meeting that not a single liquor outlet would be allowed to operate in Nagpur and neither would anyone be allowed to consume liquor. The government's repression only intensified after this announcement. Dr. Hedgewar was served a legal notice, which read: "I pronounce a ban on your holding meetings, participating in them or assembling in any meeting for one month". But flirting with danger, and making them his companion was not new for Dr. Hedgewar, and he openly violated this latest government order.[3] The government issued an order banning any public meeting for two months and tried to implement it with harshness.

Social Base

There was another underpinning to the success of the movement in Nagpur. Special attention was paid to the economically weaker sections who remained unconnected to the national movement and were busy earning their livelihood. Dr. Hedgewar and the other members of the Nagpur National Union, keeping their socioeconomic conditions in view, made special efforts to reach out to the Momin and Koshthi communities to inculcate national consciousness in them. The campaign against alcoholism proved very successful amongst these communities and they participated in the movement in large numbers. The social base of the movement grew and became more consolidated because of Dr. Hedgewar's policy. In Nagpur, the movement touched base with the upper castes, educated and elite gentry before reaching the powerful elements of the lesser privileged. It is for this reason that prominent pro-British newspapers commented: "Looking at the kind of volunteers recruited, it would be an exaggeration to say that the nonviolent nature of the movement would endure".[4]

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3 *Maharashtra;* April 29, 1921; p 7.
4 *Hitvada*; February 26, 1921; p4.

The boycott of schools and colleges in Nagpur met with the success it had expected. More than seventy per cent of the Neil City School and 27.5 per cent of the Morris College's students boycotted their classes. Till May 1921, 40 advocates of the Nagpur Division had completely boycotted the court. Dr. Hedgewar organized a huge meeting in their honour at Nagpur. The administrative report of 1920-21 of the Central Provinces mentioned the ongoing political activities in the province and wrote: "The dangerous and anarchist principle of non-cooperation has grown rapidly, and has struck a far more serious blow on the cordial relations between the government and the people than any other propaganda hitherto". This can said to be a certificate of the movement's success in Nagpur and the Central Provinces. From January 1921 till 1922, the government filed cases against 25 nationalists for delivering 'seditious' speeches. Of these 11 were awarded rigorous imprisonment, two simple imprisonment and two others got special imprisonment.

Dr. Hedgewar himself faced legal proceedings in May 1921 for his 'seditious' speech. That very month, he was elected as a member of the Provincial Congress Committee in Nagpur. During the course of the Non-cooperation Movement, the older Swarajist leadership gradually yielded space to the young Turks like Dr. Hedgewar, Dr. Cholkar and Salimullah Khan, who now came to the fore. While Cholkar and Khan were also associated with parliamentary activities, Dr. Hedgewar kept himself totally aloof from electoral politics.

Historic Trial

The historic and unprecedented success of the Non-cooperation Movement in Nagpur threw the British colonial regime and its administration into consternation. All means adopted by the government to crush the movement were proven futile. Everything from the use of Section 144, bans on meetings, processions and speeches and the use of force was tried, but this further strengthened the movement instead of weakening it. Finally, the government now resorted to the stratagem of filing cases of 'sedition' against prominent leaders of the movement and imprisoning them. The clear purpose of this step of the government was to intimidate agitationists and render the movement leaderless. In 1921, from January to May, seven people in the Central Provinces were charged with sedition.[1] From Nagpur, Dr. Hedgewar's name figured in the list.

He was charged under the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) and a case was slapped on him in May 1921. Hedgewar's increasingly anti-regime activities made the colonial government resolute to punish him. This was the reason his two speeches delivered (on October 24, 1920) in meetings at Katol and Bharatawada were used as a pretext for the charges against him.[2] Hedgewar had chaired those meetings. He was accused of inflammatory speeches, inciting hatred and of promoting subversion of the government. In 1908 Lokmanaya Tilak was accused and charged on the basis of his fiery writings. In his defence during his trial, Tilak attacked the government and its repressive policies. His trial went on to become one of the stirring

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1 File No. 28/1921, Political, part-1, para-17, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

2 *Maharashtra*, 15th June, 1921, p.4.

and inspiring episodes in the history of India's freedom struggle. So did Dr. Hedgewar's trial. His fiery speech against imperialism in the court during the course of his trial, and his strong and irrefutable arguments for independence are historic and enlivening.

It is also true that among many other illustrious episodes of our freedom movement, Dr. Hedgewar's trial too has remained buried in the archives for decades. The discovery of such incidents during the course of research throws new light on interpretation of the anti-imperialist struggle, its nature and content. It is entirely probable that this trial of Dr. Hedgewar will also prove to be one such illustrious episode.

The case was opened in the court of Siraj Ahmed in Nagpur on May 31, 1921. After the initial hearing, the next date given for the trial was 13th June when the case was transferred to the court of Mr. Smelly. The legal luminaries of the city R. Bobade, Vishwanathrao Kelkar, Balwantrao Mandelkar, Baburao Harkare and Babasaheb Padhye appeared on behalf of Dr. Hedgewar. On the first day (June 13, 1921) police sub-inspector Abaji of Katol gave his testimony on behalf of the government. The next day, i.e., June 14, he was cross-examined by Bobade.

The judge began objecting to each of questions of the defence. When Bobade wanted to know whether the police had lodged the case against Dr.Hedgewar on its own, or under pressure of their superiors, sub-inspector Abaji admitted, "I cannot initiate the case without the permission of a superior authority. I got the permission of a senior officer a month before." Upon this, the court warned Bobade not to ask him any further questions on the matter.

Upon Bobade's further questioning, the witness replied that he could write 30 to 40 words per minute as part of his duty to take reports of speeches. In Bobade's opinion, Hedgewar's speeches largely dealt with contemporary politics. Therefore, an accurate reporting on them could be done only by those who were aware of current political developments. Bobade now asked the sub-inspector few more questions:

"Are you a subscriber of newspapers and journals which discuss the political movements?"

"How many times you have read the resolutions on Non-cooperation passed by the Congress?"

"Have you read Gandhi's articles?"

The court objected to each of these questions. But defence counsel Bobade remained adamant, and eventually the judge was compelled to withdraw his objection. Bobade now asked Abaji, "Has the Non-cooperation Movement resolved to conduct its agitation peacefully and without recourse to violence?" The government's witness was unable to answer this question and solicited the help of the public prosecutor. Bobade's next question too, drew the objection of the judge. Bobade asked, "What sort of Swarajya do they want to achieve?" The police sub-inspector replied, "By Swarajya, they mean people's rule." By now, the judge was exasperated at Bobade's questioning and dismissed them as 'irrelevant', 'meaningless', 'out of context', or 'not at all concerned to the case'. He then adjourned the court till June 20, a Monday.

The case took a dramatic turn on June 20th. Bobade got into a tangle with the judge. When the case reopened on 20th June the sub-inspector was again summoned to the witness box for cross-examination. Bobade's question, "Is it not true that Dr. Hedgewar propounded the principle of India for Indians in his said speech?" This too, was objected to by the judge who refused to note it down. This infuriated defence counsel Bobade, who then accused the judge of being prejudiced and obstructing the process of impartial cross-examination. He then announced his decision to boycott the court and withdraw from the case. Looking at subsequent events, it does appear that this step of Bobade's was pre-planned.

Dr. Hedgewar now himself took up proceedings and decided to plead his own case. He had never been a student of law and this was his first experience in a court of law. Yet, he was not one to be daunted. On the other hand, Hedgewar wanted to use the court as a political platform against British rule, imperialism and the flawed system of justice, which he did with aplomb during his trial.

He opened his own defence with a stinging rebuke of the judge himself. Only a towering nationalist can muster the courage

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to label a judge as unworthy, ignorant and unfit. Dr. Hedgewar displayed exemplary courage and self-confidence in doing so. He asked Judge Smelly to halt the proceedings of the case till such time a final decision on his (Hedgewar's) application to change the judge was not given. Though stunned into humiliation, Smelly had to agree to Hedgewar's demand.

On 25th June, Dr. Hedgewar presented an application in the court of District Magistrate Irwin. The application was unique in itself, stating that a British judge was unfit to judge on a case involving an Indian. Judge Irwin's decision on Hedgewar's appeal was of course, a foregone conclusion. But Hedgewar's actual intention was to use Smelly as a shield to strike at the British system of justice. The gist of his applications ran thus:

> "Mr. Smelly does not possess even an elementary working knowledge of Marathi, whereas all my speeches and statements are in Marathi. Therefore, he is not worthy to adjudicate this case. Evidence of this can be gauged from the blank sheets of paper for disposition he has. Despite a lengthy hearing on June 14, he was unable to pen down even a single word. In addition to this, his political awareness is also questionable. That is why he raises objections to every question raised by the counsel. He has to make an effort to understand the purpose of every question put, before the proceedings can even move ahead. Owing to lack of understanding of the proceedings, he dismisses questions being asked as 'irrelevant', 'unrelated' or 'out of context'. Had those questions not been dismissed and the public prosecutor forced to answer them, it would have been proven that there was no sedition in my speeches".

Irwin, naturally, rejected Dr. Hedgewar's application on June 27 and pronounced that "Smelly is fully competent to be a judge in this case".

The trial now reopened in Smelly's court on June 28th. The judge humiliated and incensed by now, asked Hedgewar to submit a written statement. Dr. Hedgewar opposed this ruling and

categorically reiterated that he would only give a written statement after listening to all the witnesses and evidences from the government's side. The magistrate emphatically said that the court had the right to ask for written statement any time and he had to comply with it. Upon this, Dr. Hedgewar fearlessly replied, "I have stated whatever I wanted to say. I am firm on that. I shall give my statement only at the end".[3] Hedgewar's aggressive stance in the court and its matter-of-fact articulation reflects his unshakeable willpower. The court had to yield to Hedgewar's argument and the hearing on this case was postponed to the next date, i.e., 8th July.

When the case reopened on 8th July, Dr. Hedgewar started cross-examining Gangadhar Rao, Circle Inspector of Katol Division, who appeared as the next witness.

Dr. Hedgewar: Up to what time did the meeting go on? What is the method of transcribing the speeches?

Rao: The meeting ended approximately at 7.45 p.m. We were taking notes in torchlight.

Dr. Hedgewar: They were in the dark and there was no lamp or torch with them. Moreover, I speak perfect Marathi but they have put words like "*Baikocha Por*", (slave of wife or henpecked husband) in my mouth. The witness appears to be totally illiterate.

Witness: I do not know the rules of grammar. I talk with my mother in Telugu and with my wife in Marathi. I can write on an average 25 to 30 words, a minute. Sometimes I can write complete sentences and sometimes one or two words and the summary of the sentence. There is no need to listen to the whole sentence to write a summary. Along with your speech I wrote the summary. Whenever I could not understand or missed anything, I solicited the help of other sub-inspectors who were present there. Doctor (Hedgewar) spoke 20-25 words a minute.

Dr. Hedgewar now intervened and asked the court's permission to test the witness to find out how efficient he was in taking notes of

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3 *Maharashtra,* June 19, 1921, p.4; "Dr. Hedgewar Yancha Khatla".

speeches. However, this was not permitted by the court. He then wanted to know about the witness' education.

Rao:I am in government service for the last 24 years. I failed in the intermediate examination. First I was appointed as a head constable, and then was promoted as Sub-Inspector. I am now holding the position of Circle Inspector. I do not know whether Alekar and Ogale were present in Katol's public meeting. Like others, I was also impressed by his (Hedgewar's) speech. But I was sure that the speaker was speaking untruths."

Hedgewar: The speeches presented before the court are not mine. On an average, I speak 200 words per minute. A novice reporter using 'long hand' who may have come to take notes could not have taken down even an eighth part of my speech. Therefore, the complainant's entire report contains incomplete sentences and broken words. Besides, they are a pack of lies. There is no doubt that the incompetent policemen used their imagination and memory to write their report on my speech. Reading this report, nobody can surmise what and how I spoke. And it was not possible to note down my last speech in Bharatwada as even a pencil and paper were not visible in the extreme darkness. The police had no provisions for light. The report of my speeches submitted here is concocted and to demonstrate that 'we are working rigorously to suppress the people's movement.' Therefore, obviously, the police report on my speech is concocted. Even a cursory look by any educated person would prove its deviousness. It seems that some of the notes were not even read in the court due to this apprehension. It becomes clear now that had the trial been conducted judiciously, the arguments of the complainants would have been completely exposed. Any person of judicious mind would discard the report of the complainant by observing the ludicrous statements made by Shri Gangadhar Rao, his style of taking notes and the normal speed and fluency of my speech. Had I been allowed to demonstrate that how many words the witness could write of my speech it would have clearly revealed the untruths, the lowly tactics adopted by the police. But it is a matter of surprise that maximum obstacles have been created in my trial. I know, for a fact, that there would not be any effect of my opposition on a government that represses the

patriots of my motherland. I still say that Hindustan belongs to its natives and Swarajya is our ultimate aim. If the declaration of the right to self-determination by the British PM and the British government are a hoax upon the people of the world then the British government would consider my speech as seditious. But I have faith in the eternal justice of Almighty God."

Hearing on the case reopened on 9th July 1921. Dr. Hedgewar requested the court to summon the government's witnesses once again to cross-examine them. He argued that since his lawyer had walked out from the court, the government's witnesses could not be properly cross-examined. To this, the magistrate pointed out that under Section 108, the law could not permit him to call them again. This led to a prolonged debate between Hedgewar and the court stretching for two consecutive days from the 9th to 11th July. Dr. Hedgewar produced many legal evidences to support his argument and insisted that it was the fundamental legal right of an accused to cross-examine the witnesses again. However, the prosecutor objected to his claim and in his argument, concentrated more on Dr. Hedgewar's behaviour in court rather than the legal provisions. On 13th June, the magistrate gave his ruling that the cross-examination of the witnesses could not be permitted again. On 9th July Dr. Hedgewar presented a written statement:

a) "I have been asked to expound upon the allegation levelled upon me whether my speeches intend to arouse disaffection and promote hatred and contempt against the British government and incite animosity between Indians and Europeans. It is an affront to me and my great country that an alien power should probe and sit in judgement on the actions of an Indian.

b) I don't think there is any judicious government in India and it would be quite confounding for me if someone presumes otherwise. What we have here today is the regime of terror and tyranny enforced with demonic power. The law is its slave and the courts are its mere tools. The only government that has a right to exist in any part of the world is a

government of the people, by the people and for the people. All other systems of governments are illegitimate and riddled with an inducement to plunder nations by fraudulent people.

c) I have tried to awaken feelings of profound devotion among the sons and daughters of my motherland. I have tried to engrave in their hearts that India is for Indians. If the situation has reached to the extent that an Indian cannot deliberate upon the elements of patriotism without being seditious and cannot speak truth without being accused of sedition or treason, then the appropriate time has now arrived for graceful departure of the Europeans and those who consider themselves as the government of India.

d) Notes of my speeches were not taken down correctly. They are a broken, distorted and incongruent account of my original speech. But I am not bothered about that. The fundamental elements which determine relations between nations have formed the basis of my behaviour towards the Europeans and the British. Whatever I said was meant to re-establish the liberty and rights of our countrymen and I am ready to take responsibility for every word I have spoken. If I can't say anything about allegations made upon me then I am prepared to accept every word of it and I say that everything is justified."

On 5th August when the case reopened again, the judge permitted Dr. Hedgewar to defend himself against the charges levelled at him. The comprehensive, sensitive and reasoned manner in which Dr. Hedgewar attacked the imperialist rule is truly an articulation of the highest order of nationalism. Dr. Hedgewar said:

> "I will have to criticise both the government and bureaucracy. Therefore, I request you to kindly forget for a while that you are a government servant and listen to my speech as a stranger. The government has presented three policemen as witnesses in my case. These policemen have agreed to the fact that the reports of the speeches, which are

> the basis of the case, were written by them. Therefore it would be proper to call them *Vadi* (complainant) than the witnesses. These witnesses are total slaves of the government. They are dependent on the government for their daily livelihood. It is no wonder that these people give false witnesses on behalf of the government. The *Vadi* party should have called at least one witness who is not a government servant. But the government is aware that no one would be ready to appear in court as witness on its behalf, except its sycophants.

Dr. Hedgewar quoted Smelly's earlier decisions in order to corroborate his own arguments. It was Smelly himself, who in the case of Dr M.R. Cholkar and the Judicial Commissioner in Narayanrao Vaidya's case had pronounced judgements that "In such cases, independent witnesses are more reliable than police officers". In Hedgewar's case, however, Smelly was found to be quashing the very norms and rules of justice which he had adhered to a mere three months earlier. This was more than ample evidence of the fact that the British regime was specifically targeting Dr. Hedgewar among the nationalists in Nagpur. After the cross-examination, Dr. Hedgewar echoed the thundering sentiments of nationalism to the huge crowd assembled in the compound of the court:

> "Usually the topic of my speech is 'India is meant for Indians. We want *Swarajya* in India.' But this alone is not enough. It is also imperative to explicate to the people how to accomplish our goal, i.e., *Swarajya*, and how to conduct after acquiring *Swarajya*? Otherwise our people would emulate the British in accordance with the dictum of '*Yatha Raja Tatha Praja'* (as is the ruler, so are the people). Everybody has understood from the recent war (World War I) that the British people are not content with their own country. They invade other countries to make them their slaves and rule over them but when their own freedom is endangered, they brandish weapons and do not hesitate to shed blood. That is the reason why we have to tell our people not to emulate the savage characteristics of

the British. We have to educate our people that after acquiring freedom, they shall not invade other countries, but remain content with their own. In order to stress these points and to engrave them in the hearts of our people I explain to them that it is unjustifiable to rule over other countries and peoples. Naturally, this makes me deal with contemporary politics.

Unfortunately, outsiders (the British people) are ruling over our beloved motherland India. Mr. Public Prosecutor, I have a direct question to you. Is there any law by which people of one country have a right to rule over other countries? Can you answer my question? Is this phenomenon not against natural law and justice? If it is really true that people of one country do not have right to rule over other, then who has given the British the right to rule Indians and trample upon them? The British certainly are not from our country. They have compelled the people of India to become slaves and forcibly imposed themselves as the rulers of India. Is this not a murder of justice, ethics and religion?

We don't have the desire to make England our colony and rule over it but we want to rule our own country India, just as the British rule Britain and Germans rule Germany. We want absolute independence and will not accept any compromise in this regard."

Finally, Dr. Hedgewar again posed a very potent question to the public prosecutor. "Is the desire for independence of one's country against ethics or law? I am sure that laws are made to protect ethics, not to destroy them."[4]

The public prosecutor commented that Hedgewar's speech was quite straightforward but added, "But his speech in the public meetings must have been quite different. Otherwise, there was no reason for any misunderstanding on the part of the police reporters."

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4 *Maharashtra,* August 10, 1921; p.5.

The court declared it would give its verdict on 19th August. Both the courtroom and its premises outside were packed with people. Smelly pronounced his verdict at 12.30 pm in the afternoon. Commenting upon Dr. Hedgewar's speech in his own defence, Smelly observed: "His defence is more seditious than his original speech". Then, pronouncing his judgement, Smelly said, "Your speech is undoubtedly seditious. Therefore, you shall not deliver any speech of this nature for the period of one year. As surety, you shall have to furnish two separate bonds amounting to rupees thousand each and another thousand rupees as mortgage bond".

Snubbing the imperial system of justice once again, Hedgewar's voice resonated throughout the courtroom, "You may give whatever verdict you like. I am not guilty. My conscience assures me that I am not guilty. The Government with its crooked policy is pouring oil in the fire by such tyrannical measures. I am sure that these alien rulers will soon have to repent for their sins. I have full faith in the justice of the Almighty God. Therefore, I refuse to furnish bail as directed by the Court." Upon his outright refusal to pay the bail amount, Magistrate Smelly pronounced a year's rigorous imprisonment. [5]

As he emerged from the courtroom, all prominent Congressmen of Nagpur felicitated him. On behalf of the local Congress Committee, R. Gokhale, Dr Monje, Vishwanathrao Kelkar, D.M. Deshmukh, R. Harkare, Samimullah Khan, Alekar, Vaidya, Mandlekar and others were present. Hedgewar's uncle Moreshwar Hedgewar and elder brother Sitaram Pant too, were present. Dr. Hedgewar briefly addressed the people assembled and then set off to jail. His address to the people was also an attempt to dispel the two serious misconceptions which have unfortunately made their way into our contemporary political life. Defending oneself legally in court was looked down upon, while going to jail was considered synonymous with meaningful participation in the freedom struggle.

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5 *Kesari,* 23 and 30 August 1921,p.7.

"I have put forth my side in my defence during this trial for sedition. These days, a misconception has taken hold that whoever defends oneself legally is akin to a traitor. However, to be quashed like a cockroach without even defending oneself does not appeal to me. We must certainly do everything to expose the lowly nature of this regime, which is also a form of service to the nation. Not defending oneself is suicidal. If you don't like defending yourself, it may be all right for you, but do not look down upon those who do so".

"We should be ready to face the most rigorous confinement and even the gallows for the sake of the freedom of our motherland, not just a mere jail sentence. But we should also not harbour any misconception that going to jail is a certificate of honour. Do not believe that a mere trip to jail is going to get us freedom. One can also serve one's nation by remaining outside and not going to jail. I shall be back after a year, though I will be cut off from developments in the country till then. But I am confident that the movement for complete independence of India will soon begin. It is not possible to keep India under the bondage of foreign powers any longer. She cannot be kept enslaved any longer. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all and seek leave for one year".

Dr. Hedgewar's arrest generated a wave of inspiration in the political life of the Central Provinces. A massive rally was organized on August 19 in the town hall in Nagpur in his support, presided over by Govindrao Deshmukh. All prominent Congress leaders of the Central Provinces were present in the meeting. Alekar described Hedgewar as "a real leader of the young generation. His sacrifice is beyond description."

The *Kesari, Maharashtra, Young Patriot, Udaya* and other newspapers heaped praises on Dr. Hedgewar's intrepid and exceptional arguments in court. The *Udaya* of Amravati in its editorial wrote in its appreciation: "Dr. Hedgewar's argument in court was both simple and clear. Though, like Dr Cholkar, he too

propounded the cause of independence, he was awarded rigorous imprisonment of one year. Such a punishment cannot, however, prevent the arousal of hatred for an administration based on bureaucracy and its whims and fancies". [6]

Dr. Hedgewar's trial assumes more importance because of the fact that at no time did he ever adopt a stance of compromise for his concept of complete independence. His opposition to imperialism was not merely emotional or born of impulse. Hedgewar, in fact, through his forceful and irrefutable arguments demonstrated imperialism to be an unnatural state of affairs on scientific, moral, political and economic grounds. This is one of the earliest instances of opposition to imperialism on the grounds of principle. He was not yet a national figure, but his sacrifice and bold and forthright patriotic statement greatly enhanced his credibility and popularity. His work now became a source of inspiration and energy for the new generation of nationalists in the Central Provinces.

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6 *Udaya*; Editor: B.G. Khaparde; *Report on Indian Newspapers*, Central Provinces and Berar, No35/1921, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

Righteous and Resolute

Non-cooperation Movement widened the social base of the freedom movement in Central Provinces and a new set of leaders emerged stoking the anti imperialist movement from old guards and elites. Dr Hedgewar emerged as one of the brightest star in the firmament. He was a man with a clear vision. He observed that a new political culture was being formed .i.e., going to jail was becoming a status symbol for the nationalists. Many patriots felt elated while going jail or after their release and used the opportunity to increase their political status. Such things were absolutely unacceptable to Dr Hedgewar who didn't feel shy to correct the misgivings.

Hedgewar before stepping into jail addressed his supporters who had come to see him off. His speech was actually a pot-shot against the prevailing political psychology of the day. He dispelled with sound logic, the faulty notion that going to jail was synonymous with lofty character and patriotic service. Dr. Hedgewar was of the firm opinion that one should go to jail only when necessary, and those who remain outside the jail are in no way less patriotic. One could play an important role remaining out of jail. This minor but important observation of Hedgewar now triggered an intellectual debate among Nagpur's nationalists. Some considered Dr. Hedgewar's own personality and this particular opinion of his to be mutually contradictory. Questions arose as to why did he not seek bail and continue his contribution to the freedom movement remaining outside jail. The *Maharashtra,* a prominent weekly published from Nagpur answered this doubt. Its editor Gopalrao Ogale, congratulating Dr. Hedgewar for his anti-imperialist deeds and uncompromising outlook wrote:

> "Dr. Hedgewar chose to go to jail much against his own principle. He considered this jail sentence necessary in

order to avoid being stigmatized as "one afraid of going to jail". Public stigmatization can prove to be even more damaging than the curse of the legendary ill-tempered Rishi Durvasa of yore. It tests the greatest of beings. It is owing to the sheer force of adverse public opinion that Lord Ram had to banish his beloved consort Sita for a second time, even though he fully knew of her spotless character. So too, Dr. Hedgewar, knowing full well that he would be doing far more constructive work for the national movement by remaining out of prison, accepted his prison sentence in order to escape public criticism. "I hold public opinion to be truly strong"; these words of Lord Shri Ram have to be adhered to by all those who enter public life. Therefore, we have full faith that Dr. Hedgewar, who has gone to jail of his own volition, will present an ideal of selfless sacrifice and soon return, more illustrious, in order to lead the rising generation of Nagpur and to propagate his ideal of complete independence" [1]

Life in Jail

Dr. Hedgewar was brought to the Ajni Jail, Nagpur, on August 19, 1921. Not only had he been handed a rigorous prison sentence of one year, the administration also ordered that he be kept under close scrutiny because of his fiery and unyielding nature. Along with Hedgewar, four other agitationists Raghunath Ramchandra Pathak, Pt. Radhamohan Gokulji, Veer Harkare and Inamullah Khan too were interned in the same jail. Hedgewar's companions in jail were of different nature and disposition. Pathak was a lawyer and was straightforward in nature. Veer Harkare was a fiery nationalist; Pandit Gokulji was a staunch Arya Samajist and a votary of aggressive Hindutva, while Inamulla was a devout Muslim and supporter of the Khilafat movement. Acrimonious exchanges between Pandit Gokul ji and Inamullah on issues of religion were almost a daily occurrence, which sometimes would almost erupt into a physical fight. It would be left to Dr. Hedgewar

1 *Maharashtra,* August 24, 1921; Editorial, "Why Hedgewar went to Jail".

to step in and reconcile. Regarding Inamullah's views on Hinduism, Dr. Hedgewar discerned that this was probably due to his ignorance of Hindu Dharma. He now began to make efforts to dispel the misconceptions in Inamullah's mind concerning the Hinduism.

Dr. Hedgewar used to narrate one episode of the *Mahabharata* every day to his jail-mates. It appeared as though the rigorous imprisonment had no effect on him whatsoever. There was no trace of despondency on his face. The manner in which he narrated various episodes and examples and described its characters, made Hedgewar appear as a hermit. This was the reason jail sub-inspector Nilkanth Rao Jathar too was enamoured of his pristine character and commented, "You don't seem to be a political prisoner, but a sage endowed with spiritual persona".

Jathar was notorious for his harshness towards prisoners, but within one year, he began empathizing with the freedom struggle, deeply influenced by Dr. Hedgewar's behaviour and patriotism. He maintained his relations with Dr. Hedgewar even after his release and would go to meet him. Dr. Hedgewar was successful in leaving his imprint on Inamullah's fanaticism. After a lot of debate, he too became an avid listener of Hedgewar's Mahabharata story sessions in jail.

Jallianwala Bagh Day

Dr. Hedgewar decided to observe the 'Jallianwala Bagh Day' on April 13, 1922 inside the jail. All except Inamullah agreed. It was decided that all five political prisoners undergoing rigorous imprisonment would not do any work that day. Inamullah's condition was that he would follow Dr. Hedgewar and he too did not do any work that day. A small meeting was also organized, in which Dr. Hedgewar spoke briefly on Indian nationalism. All this was possible because of the sympathy arisen in Jathar's mind, owing to which this small programme went off without any hindrance.

Prisoners under rigorous imprisonment were assigned different tasks. Pathak was given the task of grinding flour, while Hegedwar was assigned the arduous work of paper polishing,

which caused excruciating abrasions on his palm and swelling in his hand. Yet he did not petition the jail authorities to reduce his sentence. Despite the boils on his palm, he continued working. Jathar then assigned an easier task of book-binding to Hedgewar and his four fellow-prisoners.

Out of Jail

Hedgewar's release was eagerly awaited in Nagpur and other parts of the province. Local newspapers had begun informing readers one week in advance. People's wait was finally over, and Hedgewar walked out free on July 11, 1922 after completing his sentence. It seemed as though nature too, was ready and waiting to welcome him; there was a heavy downpour of the kind seen after many months. Daily life was thrown out of gear, but the heavy rains failed to quell the rising tide of nationalist fervour. Thousands had thronged the precincts of Ajni Jail and waited for Dr. Hedgewar to step out. People's enthusiasm was unabated and they seemed to enjoy the pouring showers. All prominent Congress leaders of the Provinces were present. These included Dr Moonje, Dr N.B. Khare, Dr Paranjpe, Balwantrao Mandlekar, Appasaheb Haldar, Dr Panchkhede and Veer Harkare, who had been released from jail before Hedgewar. The *Maharashtra* wrote about Hedgewar's release: "His patriotism is above all controversies. Hedgewar has proven his sincerity in jail. His extraordinary sacrifice has made his inborn patriotism shine with ever greater lustre. His stay in jail too has been spotless".[2]

A welcome rally was organized at Nagpur's Chitnis Park the next day. Along with the Province's Congress leaders, national figures like Hakim Ajmal Khan, Motilal Nehru, C. Rajgopalachari, Dr. Ansari and Vithalbhai Patel too were present there to felicitate Dr. Hedgewar.

The popularity of Dr. Hedgewar, the magnetism of his personality and the awe his voice commanded can be gauged from the sheer size of the gathering that had assembled. The rains on July 12 were as heavy as those of the previous day and the venue of the

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2 *Maharashtra,* July 12, 1922; p5.

meeting was shifted to Vyankatesh Theatre at the last moment. Even here, the doors of the theatre had to be closed owing to paucity of space. Despite this, thousands gathered in the ground outside the theatre in order to have a glimpse of Dr. Hedgewar and listen to him speak. Rainwater could not quench their nationalist thirst, but Dr. Hedgewar's voice did.

For the leaders of national stature present at the rally, the surging popularity of a seemingly local leader was indeed surprising. Two parallel rallies were held to welcome Dr. Hedgewar that day one inside the theatre and the other on open grounds.

Dr. Khare presided over the meeting. First, a resolution congratulating Dr. Hedgewar was passed and he was laden with garlands. The audience clapped whenever any speaker eulogised Hedgewar's selfless love for the nation and his sacrifice. The Congress (Civil Disobedience) Inquiry Committee also got an opportunity to explain the Congress' position to the gathering. In response to his tumultuous welcome, Dr. Hedgewar spoke briefly, taking a wry swipe at the praises being heaped at him, "My worth hasn't increased because of spending a year as the guest of the government. And if it truly has, then we should be indeed grateful to the government".

Truth be told, being welcomed, felicitated and eulogised in this manner was totally alien to Hedgewar's nature, a trait which he proved in his later life too. What we today term as sacrifice and patriotism was expected of every Indian by him. Dr. Hedgewar then told the assembled provincial and national leaders there, in very clear terms about the goal of complete independence "We have to present the highest goal before the nation, and there can be no greater goal than the attainment of complete freedom. It would be demeaning to lecture those who are well-versed with the history of our freedom movement on the methods for attaining independence and their appropriateness. We should not, however, flinch from courting death for the sake of our country's freedom. While keeping our goal very lofty, it is also important that we keep a balanced mind too", he said. [3]

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3 *Maharashtra,* July 19, 1922; p11

Clearly, Dr. Hedgewar was subtly attacking the elitist goals of parliamentary politics and the craving for some sort of 'dominion status'. After Nagpur, Dr. Hedgewar was felicitated at other places in the Central Provinces. Prominent rallies were held in his honour at Wardha, Yavatmal, Akola, Chanda, Mohopa and Wani.

Altered Political Environment

Dr. Hedgewar encountered a completely altered political environment when he rejoined the national movement after spending a year in jail. The Non-cooperation Movement had been withdrawn by Mahatma Gandhi on February 12, 1922, in the aftermath of violence by a mob in Chauri Chaura in the United Province on 5th February that year. Gandhi's decision to shelve the movement caused a wave of disappointment in the country and also considerable heartburn among the nationalists.

The Congress was also divided into two camps over the question of participating in the elections to be held for the Legislative Councils. One faction of the Congress, led by Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru held that Gandhi's policies were impractical. They supported participation in the Legislative Council elections whilst remaining in the Congress. There was more support for the Das-Nehru line of thinking in the Marathi-speaking areas of the Central Provinces as compared to its other zones. All the senior leaders B.G. Khaparde, Dr Moonje, Wamanrao Joshi and others were supportive of the Congress' entry into the Legislative Council. These gentlemen did not agree with Mahatma Gandhi's political philosophy or his programmes. Thus, the Swaraj Party emerged as a strong institution on the Central Provinces soon after its formation. Dr. Hedgewar, however, was not in favour of cooperation with the government. He did not wish the struggle against imperialism to be supplanted by jostling for entry into its institutions like the Legislative Council. Eknath Ranade wrote in this regard, "He was a revolutionary; not a parliamentary politician". [4]

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4 Eknath Ranade; "Greatest Hindu of the Age"; *Organiser,* July 23, 1950.

Dr. Hedgewar had bluntly said, "The goal of complete independence cannot be supplanted by "dominion status". He now began using the welcome rallies, organized for him, to infuse fresh life into the Congress, sunk in despair. His goal was to steer grassroots workers away from the factional feuds of the senior leaders and re-energize them for the goal of complete independence. He considered contesting elections as losing track of the ultimate goal. But Dr. Hedgewar was perhaps the only popular leader in the Marathi-speaking areas of the Central Provinces who was steadfast in such an unalloyed national outlook. Almost all Congress leaders were by then divided into the Gandhi and Das-Nehru factions of the party.

Dr. Hedgewar faced this unfortunate situation with great fortitude and calmness. He refused to align himself with either of these factions; he did not criticize any faction either. His presence was sought after for presiding over political meetings or rallies. He presided over a two-day Congress meet at Balaghat. The first day, i.e., December 16, 1922, saw discussion on contemporary political issues. Apart from Dr. Hedgewar, Somaji Patil, Moreshwar Hedgewar, Thakur Narhari Singh, Balwantrao Dikshit and Pt. Narmada Prasad too expressed their views. Dr. Hedgewar exhorted them to be "loyal to principles" rather being "loyal to any individual". It was his influence that resolutions on issues like *khadi, swadeshi*, gram panchayats and cow-protection were passed on the second day of the conference. The passing of these resolutions was necessary as almost all senior leaders of the province had rejected Gandhian programmes. Not only that, when a resolution that read "this conference opposes the entry into Legislative Councils" was introduced, an amendment pertaining to the proposed entry into Legislative Councils was also introduced. Dr. Hedgewar tried to make the delegates understand, but a section among them was adamant on its stand. He then permitted a division of votes, following which the pro-entry faction sailed through. [5]

Instead of imposing his view on the delegates, Dr. Hedgewar thought it appropriate to adopt democratic means. The Balaghat

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5 *Maharashtra,* December 20, 1922; p4.

conference was a widely discussed affair in the province and it was because of his democratic approach that Dr. Hedgewar gained maximum acceptability in the political circles of the Central Provinces. He became the provincial joint secretary and was assigned the responsibility of conducting elections to local bodies and enhancing their membership. After the *de facto* split in the Congress over the Legislative Council entry issue, Hedgewar now remained the only member who was not aligned to either faction. On April 13, 1923, when a "Flag Satyagraha" was organized at Nagpur, the Moonje faction accused the rival faction of deliberately ignoring Tilakites. Dr. Hedgewar, however, chose to remain aloof of this intra-party tussle and concentrated on training volunteers for satyagraha.

This political factionalism had, in fact, begun to cause the neglect of volunteers in the province. Many of them were idle, which pained Dr. Hedgewar. He wished to highlight the role of the ordinary worker more than the doings of the leaders. Hedgewar undertook an important initiative to reorient them in the national movement. With the support and cooperation of Seth Jamnalal Bajaj, Neelkanthrao Deshmukh, M.S. Aney and Appasaheb Khaparde, he established the 'Wardha Parishad'. Its first conference was organised at Nagpur on 22 October 1923. The resolution passed at this conference voiced regret at the deviation in national politics saying "people are giving primacy to issues other than the struggle for India's independence." Six resolutions were passed in the conference, including collection of fund, felicitation of nationalists who were imprisoned for offering *satyagraha*, helping those still imprisoned, organizing the Provincial Freedom Fighters Association and intensifying Congress activities in the province. [6]

After his release from prison, Dr. Hedgewar was busy in strengthening the provincial Congress and removing the acrimony between the leadership with the grassroots and the sense of lethargy that had crept in. He addressed thousands of people through dozens of meetings. The number of his supporters was growing, but

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6 *Maharashtra,* October 24, 1923; "*Wardha Swyam sevak Parishad*".

Hedgewar remained detached from party posts or acclaim. Though his support base was not immediately visible, but his personality had many alluring features. He was dismayed at the laxity that had crept into the national movement, trading of accusations and counter-accusations, the promotion of individual interests and personal loyalties in place of principles and the overall degradation in national life. Yet, his optimistic and never-say-die spirit would not be daunted. Hedgewar knew how to combat adverse circumstances and emerge stronger from them. He had honed a positive personality in a life of ordeal. He had been part of the revolutionary movement and was now a member of a political party committed to non-violent means, yet he did not fall into the trap of being associated with any particular path, unlike some of his more well known colleagues.

Hedgewar considered the mobilization of public opinion against the imperialists as well as those who were ready to compromise with them. In the year 1924, he began making newspapers the medium to propagate his goal of complete independence, and also rose in prominence as a committed editor. Though this was a short-lived *avatar* of his, nonetheless it remains an important chapter in the history of the Central Provinces. Dr. Hedgewar was a staunch and comprehensive nationalist, who was seen in different roles at different times according to the circumstances. It would be no exaggeration to say that he was a real proponent of truth, though he never advertised this in self-aggrandizement. He had no wish to superimpose himself on the society or nation as a messiah. Hedgewar spent a year as an editor, trying to rid the freedom movement and society in general from the ills that had crept in. In this, Dr. Hedgewar wielded the pen with the clarity and bluntness of Sant Kabir of the medieval ages, whose words and deeds were what the nation needed.

Tryst with Swatantraya

Vernacular press played a vital role in the struggle against colonialism. Nationalists initiated and published newspapers and periodicals to disseminate anti British feelings and patriotic sentiments. The editorial policies of these newspapers had been influenced by its editor or owner's perspective. Some followed aggressive nationalism, some Gandhian idealism and some other showed their sympathy for colonial administration. By the beginning of 1924, the *Maharashtra* in Marathi, *Sankalpa* in Marathi and Hindi, *Pranvir in* Hindi and *The Hitavada in* English were among prominent periodicals and newspapers in Nagpur. With the exception of *The Hitavada,* the rest adhered to the creed of extreme nationalism. Among the province's other nationalist newspapers, the *Prajapaksh* (Akola), *Swatantrya Hindustan* and *Udaya* (Amravati) and *Young Patriot* were noteworthy. The *Maharashtra* was edited by Gopalrao Ogale, a close associate of Dr. Hedgewar and was the most popular weekly of Nagpur. It had a circulation of 6,000 at the beginning of 1924. Its editorial comments were forthrightly anti-British. The *Hitavada* was a weekly edited by H.N. Nawsarkar, with a circulation of 1,000. Its stand was pro-Britain. The *Maharashtra* and *Hitavada* were weeklies, whereas *Pranvir*, a fortnightly, had a circulation of 800. The *Sankalpa* was published in both Hindi and Marathi with a circulation of 500.

Newspapers and periodicals did not remain untouched by the influence of the Non-cooperation Movement. In keeping with the political culture of the Central Provinces, most journals were tilted towards the Swaraj Party and cooperation with the government. Personal and ideological prejudices too held considerable sway; the people of the province received more of party news and the goal of independence was relegated to the background.

It was this state of affairs of the nationalist press that led Dr. Hedgewar, Narayanrao Vaidya (who was a member of the Swaraj party) and A.B. Kolhatkar to start a new Marathi daily named *Swatantrya.* Sometime later, Kolhatkar started another publication called the Ransangram, leaving Dr. Hedgewar to independently handle the editorial responsibilities of the *Swatantrya.* Instead of condemning revolutionaries, *Swatantrya* praised their patriotism, which was not acceptable to Kolhatkar. However, the editorial board and Vaidya himself were in concurrence with Hedgewar's editorial policies. The reason for Kolhatkar quitting *Swatantrya* was his disagreement over the paper's editorial policy. While Mr. Vaidya became the manager of the *Swatantrya* press and paper, Dr. Hedgewar and Kolhatkar led the editorial team. The inaugural issue of the *Swatantrya* was published in the second week of January 1924, in which it declared its aims and objectives:

> "The Indian National Congress has been working for the last three years towards the attainment of India's political goal, but that issue has not as yet been properly solved. This daily has been started with the avowed object of defining in clear and unmistakable terms, the national goal of India. And it has been named '*Swatantrya*' in order to signify that the present is the time of self-reliance and spirit of independence as against the fence-sitter attitude of the past. This daily will try its best to place before the public an ideal, quite in keeping with the dignity and tradition of the Mother India".

The paper further clarified its goal and took a swipe at the prevailing political scenario. Keeping in view the intra-party feuds and the dictatorial tendencies of individuals of parties overshadowing the goal of independence, the paper commented: "The independence we aim at is not the goal of any particular party but of the nation as a whole, and it is hoped that all the political parties in India would sink their differences and work in a united manner for the common cause". [1]

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1 Report on Indian Newspapers of CP& Berar, No. 3 of 1924; National Archives of India, New Delhi.

Swatantrya became a popular daily soon after its publication started. People welcomed it in Nagpur. According to government records, with Dr. Hedgewar as editor, its circulation touched 1,200 from the very beginning. *Swatantrya's* popularity had a direct bearing on the circulation of *Maharashtra*, which came down from 6,000 to 5,000.

The newspaper supported the goal of complete independence, detached from individual, party or any sectarian ideology. Wherever he perceived anything wrong, Dr. Hedgewar did not hesitate to point it out. He refused to entertain any distinction between those who were close to him and those who weren't so long as he was the editor of *Swatantrya.* When Dr. Moonje raised a proposal for welcoming Britain's Prime Minister during his visit to India in the Legislative Council, *Swatantrya* wrote a stinging rebuke of the proposal. In its editorial of February 22, 1924, it commented: "In our opinion, this runs counter to the declared policies of the Swarajya Party".

When Sir Moropant Joshi, a prominent leader of the province accepted the portfolio of the Home Member, Dr. Hedgewar made a scathing attack on him. In his editorial in the *Swatantrya* on September 27, 1924, Hedgewar wrote: "Is Home Member aware that the late Hon'ble Gokhale whom he regards as his *guru* had refused the membership of Viceroy's Executive Council and Knighthood only to maintain his independence, and that he did not belong to the traditional class of *Samarthas, Paranjapes and Shastris* who were always clinging to high government officials with a view to secure places of honour and position?" Dr. Moonje, whom Hedgewar held in respect throughout his life, was ready to welcome the British Prime Minister and another supposed nationalist Joshi was actually feeling proud at landing the opportunity to be a part of the imperialist administration. How could Dr. Hedgewar's editorial policies be even remotely palatable to such leaders?

Dr. Hedgewar's role as an editor also demolished the myth that publications that supported the path of armed struggle for freedom were hostile to Gandhi's ideals and those supporting Mahatma Gandhi's views would per se condemn revolutionaries

and their methods. On the assassination of Mr. Ernest Day in Calcutta by a Bengali youngster Gopinath Saha, *Swatantrya supported Saha's act and made* a scathing criticism of the British Raj: "The Calcutta European Association has, in a mass meeting offered its heartfelt sympathy to the relatives of the deceased. But we fail to understand why the Association was not similarly moved by the *Jalianwala Bagh* tragedy, by the excesses committed during the martial law in Punjab and by the needless loss of lives of innocent Indians as a result of firing. The truth is that the murder of this sort is a direct result of repression".[2]

Which imperial administration wouldn't be thrown into consternation by the fiery writings of such a newspaper of the Central Provinces, so reminiscent of Bengal's famed *Yugantar?* The *Swatantrya* did not have the support of any political party or any individual. It survived solely on its circulation; there was no likelihood of any advertisements from the government, and private advertising in the *Swatantrya* dried up too out of fear of incurring the government's ire. Growing financial crisis impeded the *daily's* functioning, and enough copies could not be printed to keep up with the demand. The paper was not in a position to print beyond 1,200 copies. Amidst the continuous loss, it was published twice a week, and then converted into a weekly. Its pages were reduced from eight to four, but finally, in January 1925, the *Swatantrya* faced its swan song. Dr. Hedgewar himself had been working without any remuneration. Till 1924, the newspaper had incurred a loss of Rs.11,000.

The *Swatantrya,* however, never compromised with circumstances, vested political interests and forces for garnering advertisements. Dr. Hedgewar was responsible for both its publication and its closure. *Swatantrya* was the vehicle of his ideological thought, which also lent it respectability and renown, but at the same time, Hedgewar's uncompromising nature and stance also made it impossible for it to secure any financial assistance.

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2 Swatantrya; January 18, 1924.

The *Swatantrya's* issues advocated the cause of both Mahatma Gandhi and the armed revolutionaries. Most of the articles published in it were anonymous. When the *Swatantrya* faced legal proceedings for libel, Justice Chaman Lal of the Chanda court asked for the authors' names, which Dr. Hedgewar refused to supply. He was then asked to produce the original handwritten copy before court, but refused to comply with this instruction as well. The article Dr. Hedgewar wrote in the newspaper's edition of May 1, 1924, was precisely what Dr. Hedgewar spoke in one of his public speeches as the chairman of the Hindu Yuvak Parishad's session in 1938, a speech that became famous. Hedgewar wrote in this particular edition of the *Swatantrya:*

> "India today faces the serious problem of how to rid the country of slavery to a foreign power. The problem becomes all the more serious when we find that our adversaries, the British are stronger and more experienced than we are. This fact naturally leads some people to believe that the political ways and means of the East are incapable of successfully facing this situation. But in view of the past history of India, from the time of Chandragupta to the days of Shivaji, we have every reason to hold that our nation can defeat British imperialism".

The *Swatantyra* holds a place of pride in the history of India's freedom struggle. Its role, though brief, stands out for its wide influence and public awakening. Even in its short-lived life, the *Swatantrya* established a benchmark for its steadfastness in not compromising, and its strident anti-imperialist ideology. Moreover, Dr Hedgewar did not sacrifice the interests of factory workers at the cost of economic interests of the *Swatnatraya;* rather he sacrificed the revenue and stood firmly for the workers against the exploitation by factory owners. This underlines his commitment for poor, exploited and the marginalised people. His tryst with *Swatantrya* combined his anti-British tirade with social and economic justice. Therefore, he had no qualms in ending it just as he was enthused in launching it.

Formation of RSS

From the days of the Vande Mataram agitation to his foray into armed revolution, later into Gandhian agitations and thence his role as the editor of the *Swatantrya*, Dr. Hedgewar had emerged as a valued patriot. While participating in the movement and programmes for the liberation of the motherland, his mind was mulling the question of India's journey from ancient times and its cultural, economic and geographical strength in the past on the one hand reasons of increasingly erosion of its glory. His thought process was not the prisoner of the past or the present but carried the concern for posterity. He constantly contemplated the contours of political movements, the socio-cultural milieu around him and the reasons for India's decline and servitude. He remained constantly in the quest for creating a movement primarily based on cultural nationalism. He foresaw merely the end of the British rule would not resolve the very fundamental cultural and political questions which had engulfed the country for several centuries due to aggressions of the foreign rulers the British or the Mughals who were inimical to Indian culture and society. Therefore, only a movement having ambition and objective to correct the reasons for our decline could lead the mission of decolonisation and rejuvenation of Indian mind on the one hand and resurrection of philosophical and intellectual pursuit of India in global discourse on the other.

He had consciously eschewed the pursuit of wealth despite being a qualified medical doctor and his family's dire economic straits. Politically too, his fiercely independent bent of mind can be discerned from the fact that his deep admiration and respect for Lokmanya Tilak and the Hindu Mahasabha notwithstanding, did not permit himto be enslaved to their ideology and leadership. Dr. Hedgewar was of a fiercely independent frame of mind; even in his

childhood, the very sight of the Union Jack fluttering over the ancient fort of the erstwhile Bhonsla rulers was enough to disturb his mind. Material comforts were never a priority in his life.

A biography published in 1941 after the death of Dr Hedgewar complied by V N Shende says, "the ten years of his life from 1915 to 1924 were spent in minute observation and analysis of the various political movements happening in the country and institutions, and in diagnosing the ills plaguing the nation and finding solutions for them. Our motherland is second to none in the world, not only in area, population, natural beauty, mineral resources, wealth, fertility and prosperity but also in knowledge, philosophy, *dharma*, culture, history, valour, arts and crafts. Despite all this, why did this ancient Hindu nation sink deeper and deeper into the abyss of degradation, was a question that continuously agitated Dr. Hedgewar's mind. He used to contemplate long and deep for finding the real answer to this burning question". [1]

According to Hedgewar, for a nation to aspire for greatness, the feeling of an unremitting nationalism, patriotism, cohesiveness, togetherness and social sensitivity were imperative. The individual is the prime unit of the nation. It is only the refinement of the individual that can bring about the refinement of the nation. India was fortunate to have great saints and thinkers like Swami Vivekananda and many others on cultural nationalism with a glorious heritage of thought and wisdom, yet lacked the national spirit to rise above narrow considerations and artificial divisions. There was no dearth of thinkers and philosophers, thoughts and principles, history and tradition, but no organization to interweave all of them into one and lend it one single voice. He identified this serious lacuna in our national life and vowed to fill this gap. The formation of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) by him was a well thought decision to address several gaps and issues.

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1 V.N. Shende, *Param Poojneeya Dr. Hedgewar*; 1941, Nagpur,p 11.

Intrinsic Values

On the auspicious day of *Vijayadashmi* in 1925, Dr. Hedgewar announced the beginning of new movement based on ambitious project of resurrecting of cultural nationalism. He increasingly attracted young and elders in his project. Whenever a person renounces and uses his time and energy for larger interests he becomes a critical source of strength for the society. People observe him and join him. But Hedgewar was conscious that his project should not become individual centric and based on charisma. He was aware of the experiences when many a movement grew around a personality and declined either with his demise or his moral decline. Also some of them were started with a great vision but ended up as a sect. Some others eventually became letter head organizations due to narrow goals and objectives.

Therefore, since its inception his emphasis was to develop an organizational culture where individualism had no place and decisions were arrived after rounds of discussions and evolving consensus. This was reflected in his action when he called a meeting of 25 likeminded people who shared his idea of India to decide name and basic organizational structure. It included freedom fighters and social activists like, Bhauji Kavre, Anna Sohoni, Vishwanathrao Kelkar, Balaji Huddar and Bapurao Bhedi. Most of them were the childhood friends of Dr. Hedgewar and later his associates in revolutionary activities in the Nagpur National Union and the Gandhian movement. After long deliberation on its objectives the name was decided by voting. Many names were suggested which included Hindu Swayam sevaksangh, ... there was no consensus. And voting took place. 18 people favored RSS and 6 Hindu swaym sevaksangh.[2]

The beginning of the Sangh too was without any pomp and show or unnecessary publicity. While six months after its formation, the new organization was given a name, the creation of posts and responsibilities and of its structure proceeded with the

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2 Register....p. RSS archive , Nagpur,

growth of the organization. The Sangh got its name on April 17, 1926. It was therefore, natural that the formation of the Sangh did not attract even minimal attention in Nagpur's busy socio-political life, let alone make any news. Hedgewar deliberately kept this event away from any sort of publicity. To the local administration and the elite, plus the city's intellectuals, the Sangh's daily activities seemed to be a 'gymnasium', which was not surprising.

Before establishing the Sangh, Dr. Hedgewar had met many Hindu nationalists; prominent among them was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. He went to Ratnagiri to meet him. Prior to that, Swami Satyadeva toured the province in January 1925 on behalf of the Provincial Congress Committee. Dr. Hedgewar was with him throughout this tour. Throwing light on the need for a Hindu organization, Swami Satyadeva contested a perception that an anti-Muslim feeling would be the basis of any new Hindu organization. He further argued, "A Hindu organization is needed to strengthen the feeling that India means everything to us".

National Spirit in Hindu Reform

Half baked objectives of the socio-religious reform movements in India and their innate squabbles left the Hindus unorganized and helpless in dealing with the social, political and cultural issues. They had been characterized and dominated by dogma and had become the baggage of the civilization rather than its rich legacy. In the pre-RSS phase there were several movements and organizations and they did many reforms in socio-cultural life and also contributed in anti imperialist struggle.

The Brahmo Samaj of Raja Rammohan Roy (1828), Arya Samaj of Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1875) and the Ramakrishna Mission established by Swami Vivekananda were among a dozen such organizations. Fundamentally, concerned with Hindu social reforms, these organizations and their leaders influenced the contemporary political environment and national consciousness too, during the foreign rule. All of them fought against social conservatism and tried to unite Hindus through rational appeal. But their impact remained confined in terms of geography or span of time.

Dr. Hedgewar aptly believed that the Indian nation imbibes a unique civilization, culture and a universal consciousness both spiritually and intellectually. The Indian civilization and culture has its own distinct identity and its people are one with it. The Indian nation and its civilization are dependent upon each other. Any assault upon the Indian nation is akin to an assault on its civilization, as well as a challenge to its nationhood. That is why the Arya Samaj was "inspired by nationalism and democracy in all its activities".[3] Swami Vivekananda, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Maharishi Aurobindo, Bipin Chandra Pal, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and all other thinkers viewed Hindu civilization, culture and the nation above the narrow sectarian confines of religion, community, caste, language and region.

One common factor that can be discerned among all these thinkers is that all of them have accepted the intrinsic nature of the Indian nation to be spiritual and have viewed the nation as "*Devi*" (Mother Goddess). The *Rashtra Dharma* for all of them stood above everything else. There was no distinction between individual and national dharma. The renaissance of India's *Dharma*, society and culture was the era of Hindu renaissance, because the utmost influence of religious reform movements were on the Hindus.

Semitic religions, Islam and Christianity did not share the fruits of reforms since they were not prepared to negotiate with modernity. Religious reform in non-Hindu communities was either too slow or did not begin at all. It is for this reason that Raja Rammohan Roy, who made Hindu society and religion his laboratory for his reformist programmes, is termed as the "Father of Indian Renaissance". This also explains why Dr. Hedgewar's mighty initiative of the endeavour of organizing Hindus being co-terminus with the national task is reflective of the tradition of Raja Rammohan Roy. Dr. Hedgewar was of the clear opinion that Hinduism alone was the basis of cultural foundation of Indian nationalism. This did not entail giving up one's religion, but involved defining the nuance of nationalism in a historical perspective, based on an eternal cultural consciousness.

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3 A.R. Desai; *Social Background of Indian Nationalism;* p292.

Spelling the objectives of the founding of the Sangh, Dr. Hedgewar explained:

> "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sanghis an organization of people who have undertaken the yeoman task of serving the nation of their own accord and inspiration. The people of every nation create a similar organization that is intended to serve their particular nation. This Hindu Rashtra (nation), India is our dear homeland, and since it is also the domain of our work, we have established the Sangh for safeguarding it. It is on the basis of this organization that we have resolved to undertake the comprehensive development of our nation."

Dr. Hedgewar used the term "Hindu Rashtra" to denote India's cultural character and historic community which ought not to be confused with a "religious or theocratic state". Defining the concept of a nation, he said: "the land, in which the people of a particular community, following particular tradition, a common way of life and thought and sharing a common history reside, is known as a nation. That nation is then known and recognized by the name of its people. The interests and the interpersonal relations of such people are one; a common feeling of unity is present amongst them and it is this feeling that is instrumental in their progress. People who belong to different countries, adhering to different cultures and ways of life, of different ideological dispositions, having enmity and/or mutually conflicting interests and relations thereof, residing together but as oppressors and victims, being clubbed together out of circumstances but having different goals and purposes cannot constitute a nation. Such a group of people cannot be called a nation". Therefore the term and concept of Hindu Nation is an adjective of an age old civilization represented by India, not a theocratic objective. Here both the civilization and the continuity of cultural legacy are coterminous with the nation.

Nature of the Hindu Movement

It is necessary to cast a glance on the nature and extent of debate on the prevailing socio-political circumstances among the contemporary Hindu nationalists of Dr.Hedgewar's time. The

debate was influenced by communalriots, conversions and its impact and communal polarization. The consciousness of Hindu identity and its political and religious contours formed the centrality of debate in pre-RSS era. This can be seen in the writings and speeches of the prominent Hindu activists and thinkers of the twentieth century.

Lt. Col. U.N. Mukherjee of Bengal propounded the theory of the Hindus being a "dying race" in a tangible manner, on the basis of strong arguments and facts. He wrote: "We Hindus are ignorant. We remain completely oblivious to what is happening all around us. What is the state of these two communities? The Muslims have a bright future, are also aware of it and believe in it. But Hindus have no idea of it. At the end of every year they count their increased number whereas we meekly accept our dwindled strength."

Mukherjee related the disunity among Hindus not to any moral issue but to the question of their very existence. Later, the census of 1911 revealed that the Hindu population had dwindled in the past thirty years. Mukherjee's analysis of the Hindu population had a deep influence on many Hindu leaders of the day. Swami Shradddhananda wrote: "I am deeply influenced by the facts presented by Mukherjee".

Arya Samaj leader Lalchanda wrote a series of articles in the newspaper *The Punjabi* in 1909 under the heading "Self Abnegation in Politics". In these articles, he traced the causes for the downfall of the Hindus to their tendency to remain aloof from politics. Lalchanda also criticized the Congress for its complete disregard forHindu interests. He stressed the importance of uniting Hindus on a single political platform and said that this was the only solution to the crisis confronting them.

Both these thinkers had actually laid out an agenda for the Hindu movement. As a result of this debate and self-introspection, which lasted for about a decade, small organizations were formed at different places in the country. The Arya Samaj announced its "Shuddhi and Organization". Swami Shraddhanand established the "Indian Hindu Shuddhi Sabha" (purification group). Further the All India Hindu Mahasabha was established in 1915.

The founding of the Muslim League in 1906, the patronage and protection given to it by the British colonial regime and the horrifying anti-Hindu rioting by Kerala's Moplah Muslim community only strengthened the political imperative for Hindu politics. An inquiry committee under Dr. B S Moonje was sent to Malabar (Kerala), which exposed the atrocities committed on the Hindus. Muslim intransigence and aggressiveness only grew after the failure of the Non-cooperation Movement. The reaction to this was evident in the 1922 Gaya conference of the Hindu Mahasabha, which was presided over by Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. In his presidential address, Pt Malviya exhorted the Hindus to organize themselves for their self-defence.

The report of the Nagpur Commission on the Moplah riots also mentioned the need to forge religious unity among Hindus. V D Savarkar in his book *"Hindutva: Who is a Hindu"* (1923) imparted an angle of principle to the whole process. Thus, there was a broad consensus among the AryaSamaj, Hindu Mahasabha and other Hindu bodies that in the contemporary circumstances, they would have to play a leading role in the form of the political strength and organizations of Hindus. They believed that this was the real answer to British imperialism and growing Muslim aggressiveness. How to bring about unity of the Hindus divided by caste and sects? How to end the widespread contradictions among them? Could the political slogans and polemics create permanent unity among them? These were fundamental questions that remained unanswered. Savarkar's work being a brilliant piece generated a healthy debate and was perhaps one of the first organizedattempt to present the Hindu world view scholarly. While it did attempt to define the Hindu nation in the perspective of its civilization, its territorial boundaries and the heritage of its ancestors, but the debate it generated and the inability of most Hindu thinkers to answer doubts relegated his bookthat aroused consciousness, but did not proceed beyond that.

Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Bhai Parmanand, Dr Moonje, VD Savarkar, Swami Shraddhananda and Lala LajpatRai were involved in a much focused manner in the plans regarding the future of the Hindu community. Their views on the question of

nationalism were by and large in congruence with each other. The Congress was trying to articulate a composite nationalism. It was wary of being labeled as an entity that was 'Hindu in character' and in order to charter a middle path, the Congress leadership always tried to cloak Muslim communalism, fanaticism and its provocative behaviour vis-à-vis Hindus. Unfortunately, the Congress had no qualms about treating Muslim separatists with reverence and awe, but maintained its distance from the Hindu Mahasabha. Till the day of Partition, its doors were open to the Muslim League for 'dialogue', but the Hindu Mahasabha was treated as a political *pariah.*

One has to admit that the then Hindu nationalists played no small role in portraying Hindutva and the Hindu nation in a narrow sense and thereby reducing its potency. They took recourse to meetings, conferences, propaganda and political programmes and thereby limiting Hindutva to the educated intellectuals and middle-class Hindu families. Their appeal centered around one facet the Congress policy of appeasement of Muslims and the separatist character of the Muslim League. As a result, the social base of contemporary Hindu organizations remained limited. They paid scant attention to the fundamental issues that plagued the Hindu society like untouchability, hierarchical divisions among different castes and acute individualism. Social harmony in their view was dependent on a change of heart among Hindus themselves. Moreover, much of the prevalent Hindu leadership was from the elite class, and its penchant for positions of power meant that it failed to influence the common Hindu despite the innumerable failures of the Congress. Therefore, Hindutva in that particular phase of our history came to be largely defined as a `majoritarian' political concept.

When Dr. Hedgewar founded the *Sangh* in this political backdrop, he did not intend to create a Hindu defence force or an army of *swayamsevaks* (volunteers) to engage in Hindu political activity. Had that been his intention, he could have very well carried out the work of Hindu polarization and Hindu consolidation from the platform of the Hindu Mahasabha itself. He enjoyed a place of respect in the Mahasabha and also close access to all prominent

local and national Mahasabha leaders like Savarkar brothers, Pt. Malviya, Dr Moonje, Bhai Paramanand, Padmaraj Jain and Dr Shyamaprasad Mookerji.

Dr. Hedgewar was aware of the need to counter communal events and happenings and political mobilization over attacks on Hindus, and also knew that the Hindu Mahasabha was shouldering the responsibility in this regard. But the national problem required a lasting and permanent solution. The organization that Mahasabha conceived of was based on political imperatives and impulsive behaviour. Actions undertaken at the spur of the moment, or as a reaction to events lose their lustre as soon as the immediate impact and potency of those events diminish. Dr. Hedgewar's idea of a Hindu organization was one that was based on positive values, progressive and all-pervading. He therefore, preferred to remain aloof from the prickly issue of the utility or lacunae of existing Hindu organizations and charted his path afresh. No wonder the year 1925 became a milestone in the history of Indian nationalism. It was a unique link to connect the past with the present and that with posterity to nurture the cultural character of modern nation.

Philosophical Background

It is not easy to discern how far Dr Hedgewar agreed with Hindu political thought and activities from Mukherji-Lalchand (1909) to Malviya-Savarkar (1923). Studies on the *Sangh* are of the view that Dr. Hedgewar also belonged to this tradition. This however, is a simplistic, common and rather superficial manner to analyze, define and view the Hindu thought process in a holistic way. Possibly, one reason for this might also be the fact that Dr. Hedgewar never publicly expressed his disapproval or criticism of contemporary Hindu nationalist political streams, organizations or leaders, nor did he ever enter into competition for leadership or chalking out a parallel ideological path. Therefore, he was seen as a link in the chain of Dr Moonje, Malviya, Paramanand and Savarkar, at least on the surface. But a deeper insight showed his outlook to be quite distinct from those of contemporary Hindu political leaders.

Dr. Hedgewar considered the Hindu society, culture and its *dharma* to be a part of the Indian civilization. The nation takes birth from the womb of civilization, whose flow is strengthened because of the nation it inhabits. Therefore, the Hindu nation is a mirror reflecting its historical consciousness in a cultural manner since time immemorial. Hindu philosophy, literature, culture and history engender a feeling of oneness. Hindu organizations are but means to provide a lasting, dynamic and solid base to nationalism in a cultural perspective. That is the reason Dr. Hedgewar said, "The Sangh's work or its ideology are by no means our invention. Our pristine *Sanatan Hindu Dharma*, ancient culture, Hindu nation and our highly venerated and timeless saffron flag all these have been presented by the *Sangh*before all in their original conceptual form. The *Sangh* shall accept whatever methodology is deemed necessary to infuse new dynamism in these concepts in accordance with circumstances".

Hedgewar rejected U.N. Mukherjee's idea that the Hindus were a "dying race". His opinion was that judging Hindus on the basis of their numerical strength alone and imagining the downfall of the Hindu nation of course gives critical direction but did not answer cultural questions.. Hindus are a historical race denoting a distinct national identity, which is by nature imbibed with a certain consciousness. The reasons for this nation's weaknesses are the defeats suffered by the Hindu society, *dharma* and culture. Hindus had lacked the organizational instinct in the past. Dr. Hedgewar was of the clear opinion that "it is the weak society that is the root cause of external aggression. In fact, the blame for disrupting peace in the world is also laid on such weak societies and nations. Therefore, instead of wasting time blaming aggressors, it is the prime duty of the weak society and people to dispel their weakness by every means".

Dr. Hedgewar's stress was on two important aspects. First, blaming external factors for the weak political and social condition of Hindu society was to turn away from reality. Second, ascendancy is established by one's internal determination and willpower. Therefore, the diagnosis of the present state of affairs was to ceaselessly arouse and strengthen the feeling of nationalism among

the Hindus. The reason for Hindus' weaknesses was their fealty to divisive and narrow considerations. Therefore, the foremost responsibility of the organization was to awaken the Hindus' historic role on the basis of their nationalism, which remains embedded in their sublime consciousness. Dr. Hedgewar's vision was both expansive as well as all-encompassing. The Sangh's founding was not a mere reaction to the Moplah riots against Hindus, but on a positive plane. He argued: "Today, Hindus number twenty-five crores in India. The population is thirty-five crores; from where did they come? The other ten crore people at some point of time were our people". His next question denotes his balanced intellect and broad ideological template. Dr. Hedgewar asks: "Why did we lose them? It is because we were lost in deep slumber, which is why we lost them". This self-analysis was an altogether different plane as far as Hindu nationalist thinking, contemplation and reflection were concerned.

He did not approve of the definitions of 'Hindu' and 'Hindu nation', provided by contemporary Hindu nationalists, the fundamental principles of RSS. He knew the meaning of the term Hindu had got constrained and contracted due to steady external and internal aggressions and as a result, was brought down to the level of mere ritualistic practices of worshipping rather than a substantive way of life. He firmly believed and hoped that in course of time it would regain its original meaning and percept in a civilization culture contest. He knew very well that definitions woven in words were incapable of articulating or manifesting the formless content of emotions, and this limitation would render any principle ineffective. In the Sangh's functioning, Dr. Hedgewar connected intellectualism to activity and principle to practice and turned his attention to those questions that had been hitherto untouched. For instance, what was the practical construct of a Hindu? How national-minded is he and how close is he to nationalism and culture? To which identity of his caste, class, regional, linguistic or national does he attach importance and priority? How much balance does he achieve between personal affiliations and national ones? How much does he feel for his responsibility towards the nation, rising above personal and familial commitments?

The underlying principle of the Sangh is thoughtful activity. In this regard, Dr. Hedgewar said, "Let it be understood clearly that the Sangh is not a gymnasium, a club or a military school. It is a nationalist organization of the Hindus and must be stronger than steel". Undoubtedly Dr. Hedgewar established the Sangh in the same environment in which other Hindu organizations operated, but its character was fully original.

Organization

The *Kesari* wrote after Dr. Hedgewar's death: "There were many political parties at the time of Tilak's death, but none focused its attention on the most important aspects of national life inculcating pride for the nation, patriotism and self-respect. These are imperative to strengthen the fundamentals of any nation. Dr. Hedgewar activated these very principles". At the start of the Sangh, there was one word that signified its ideology 'nation'. The organization too had just one category of membership the *'swayam sevak'*. As the Sangh expanded, its organizational edifice began to take shape. The '*shakha*' (gathering of volunteers) is the collective form of all *swayam sevaks*. The purpose of indigenous sports and activities at the *shakha* is to generate the feeling of togetherness and belonging in individuals.

Dr. Hedgewar did not implement the traditional methodology of an organization like written membership or membership fees. Attendance at a *Sangh shakha* and its membership were kept voluntary. The goal of filial allegiance to the nation alone was the binding factor for unity among the members. The *shakha* is not a physical training centre, but an ideological centre for an intellectual movement. The plan of a '*SanghShikshaVarg*' (Sangh educational class) for training *swayamsevaks* and strengthening their commitment was also implemented later. This was known as the '*Adhikari Prashikshan Varg'* (Officer Training Course). *Swayam sevaks* so trained were also expected to play a greater role in the expansion of the Sangh network. This officer training module, popularly known as the OTC, was started in 1929.

Four years later Dr. Hedgewar sent those trained workers who had volunteered to serve the Sangh full-time, to different areas within the province and outside to expand the network. Such well-trained *swayam sevaks* were called *'pracharaks' who* fulfilled the role of the axis in its organization.

Fourteen years after working to expand the Sangh, Dr. Hedgewar called a meeting of all his compatriots at a village called Sindi near Nagpur. This was a ten-day meeting that figured M.S. Golwalkar, Appaji Joshi, Nanasaheb Talatule, Babaji Salodkar, Tatya Telang, Krishnarao Mohrir, Vithalrao Patki and Balasaheb Deoras, apart from Dr. Hedgewar himself. From the Sangh's point of view, this meeting proved to be highly useful. The rules of the *shakha*, the early morning prayer of the Sangh, its oath and other matters were discussed and finalized. The Sangh organization operates at two parallel levels formal and informal. The organization is set up at the formal level, which is in the form of a detailed chain of command from the *Mukhyashikshak* (head of a Shakha) to the *Sarsangchalak* (the one who heads the Sangh).

At the informal level were those *pracharaks* who remain outside the formal set-up and play a strong role in organizational activities and development. It is was his positive duality of the formal-informal setup that one individual who works at a higher echelon then works under another who is much junior to him, and also in a capacity shorn of any post, handling a much lesser responsibility at another point of time. Therefore, unlike other organizations, the source of authority and power in the Sangh was undefined and invisible. The sole reason for this was that Dr. Hedgewar established the tradition of 'collective leadership', 'collective responsibility' and decision making based on mutual consent. Thus, every member of the Sangh was a *swayam sevak* at the fundamental level. The post of the *Sarsanghchalak* carries the utmost reverence as he was held to be a 'mentor, philosopher and friend'. The structure of the Sangh made it different from other conventional organizations, which first garner funds; issues receipts and create posts before expanding their setup. But Dr. Hedgewar set up his organization before assigning it a name or creating any posts in it. The Sangh got its name six months after its

formation and the posts of *Sarsanghchalak*, *Sarkaryavah* and *Sarsenapati* were created only four years later. The creation of the position of the *Sarsanghchalak* was in itself an affair extraordinaire.

After discussion and debate on the changing political circumstances in the country, a two-day meeting of all prominent *swayam sevaks* was held in Nagpur on 9 and 10 November 1929. The meeting decided to keep the base of the organization as one adhering to a unitary leadership structure (*Ekchalakanuvartitwa*). This proved to be an important decision, on which detailed discussion took place in which Vishwanathrao Kelkar, Tatyaji Kalikar, Appaji Joshi, Bapurao Muthal, Babasaheb Kolte, Balaji Huddar, KrishnaraoMohrir, Martandrao Jog and Devaikar took part.

Adherence to a unitary leadership gave the Sangh a distinctiveness vis-à-vis other organizations based on the Western model. This was the blend of the formal and informal constructs of an organization. The importance of an individual in an organization was the moral strength he had earned. This principle was based on the belief that even an organization is akin to a family. All its members work together of their own voluntary accord, under the guidance of a worthy leadership, in order to achieve a common goal. It was in adherence to this principle that these nine principal workers of the Sangh in consultation with other *swayam sevaks*, created the post of the *Sarsanghchalak*. Dr. Hedgewar, in fact, remained oblivious of the entire process of this particular discussion of the Sangh workers.

On the last day of the meet, at a bigger gathering of the *swayamsevaks*, Appaji Joshi passed an edict before announcing the decisions of the Sangh meeting: "*Sarsanghchalakpranam* (greetings) one, two, three". All *swayam sevaks* then greeted Dr. Hedgewar as the *Sarsanghchalak* (the one who headed the RSS). He was quite taken aback. After the programme was over, he gave vent to his refusal to Appaji Joshi, "I don't like receiving the salutations of such venerable individuals who are dedicated to sacrifice". Upon this, Appaji informed him that this was the collective decision of the Sangh and "in the interests of the

organization, you must accept this decision even though it displeases you".

The *Sarsanghchalak* was like the head of the family. Dr. Hedgewar placed his role before the Sangh and established it as a tradition of the Sangh through his own democratic character, behaviour and ideals. He made the following announcements in 1933:

- The founder of this Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is not me, but all of you
- I am performing the duty of a midwife of this organization founded by you, in accordance with your wishes.
- I shall continue performing this task in accordance with your wishes and command and shall not worry about any difficulty or loss of esteem while doing so.
- Whenever you feel that the Sangh is suffering because of my inability, you shall be free to replace me with any other worthy individual.
- I shall hand over all my rights to the new *Sarsanghchalak* chosen by you and happily serve under him as a trusted *swayam sevak* from that very moment, with the readiness I have served in this post.
- My own individuality holds little importance for me; it is the Sangh's work that is of utmost importance. Therefore, I shall never shirk from doing any work in the interests of the Sangh.
- It is imperative that the commands of the *Sarsanghchalak* be carried out by *swayam sevaks* promptly and without question for the sake of discipline and the progress of the organization. The Sangh shall never allow a situation of "crown being heavier than the head" to arise. This is the secret of the Sangh's functioning.

- It is therefore, the duty of each and every *swayam sevak* to willingly obey orders and inspire others too to do the same.

The organizational head, whose thoughts are in harmony with his behaviour and actions, becomes a beacon for the organization. Dr. Hedgewar not only enunciated ideals in words but also lived by them. It is for this reason that he was a living inspiration as the foremost *Sarsanghchalak* and continues to remain so long after he has passed away. His actions throughout his life have made the unitary form of leadership and guidance an ideal model and guiding principle for organizational development and progress.

Along with the expansion of the Sangh, the intricacies and the nitty-gritty of the organization too needed to put in place. Like the British polity where conventions and traditions hold sway instead of a formal written constitution, the Sangh too functions on the basis of organizational traditions and conventions.After the position of the *Sarsanghchalak* came into being, the posts of the *Sarkaryavah* (General Secretary) and *Sarsenapati* too were conceived of. The two topmost bodies of the Sanghthe *Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha* and the *Akhil Bharatiya Karyakari Mandal*are entrusted with the task of determining the policies and programmes of the Sangh. After consulting the Sangh functionaries, Dr. Hedgewar after intensive consultations with RSS functionaries named Shri M S Golwalkar as his successor in 1940. From then on, the serving *Sarsanghchalak* chooses his successor by thorough consultations according to this tradition. Dr Hedgewar evolved the decision making mechanism through formal and informal consultations. Besides formal structure, various informal groups from bottom to top, help in arriving decisions. The core of the process is collectivism.

Another feature of the RSS is its financial independence from outside forces. Funds *are* collected at the organizational level. Once a year, on *Guru Poornima* day, *swayam sevaks* voluntarily offer their donations to the *Bhagva Dwaj*. This is called the *Guru Dakshina*, a tradition that has been in vogue in the Sangh since 1928.For the independent functioning of any organization it is

necessary that the organization must not be dependent on forces that enjoy the capacity to destabilize the collective conscience of workers and leadership. The entire methodology and design of the Sangh's functioning is Dr. Hedgewar's conception. Dattopant Thengdi has rightly said that the Sangh's ideology and method of functioning is "the progressive manifestation of Dr. Hedgewar's vision".

The purpose of making the Sangh and the nation synonymous, first articulated by Dr. Hedgewar is based on the idea of its organizational work being carried out solely with a national purpose in mind. That is why Dr. Hedgewar used to say, "Our Sangh work is national work" and that organizational work is "divine work". Briefly, only an organization created and functioning with unmitigated and pure intent can become the fulcrum of cultural nationalism. The Sangh is but an instrument to instill national spirit in the individual and cultural consciousness of the nation.

Before his death he institutionalized democratic process of evolving consensus. It is participatory collectivism model where critical deliberations run parallel. Majority view gets rejected by minority view which prevails in the process of consensus building for its macro objective. Dr. Hedgewar departed but his physical absence did not hamper the growth of the RSS nor could it destabilize its internal functioning. This made him distinct from other reformers, thinkers and organisers.

Freedom Movement and Dr. Hedgewar

The saga of freedom struggle provides a context to examine the role of multiple political actors engaged in the intricate issues of the time. Anti imperialist struggle in India had not been a simple phenomenon following the straight and the narrow. It witnessed various ideological and political shades and opinions each contesting and competing for the hegemony of its socio-economic philosophy and methods of struggle. However, with the advent of charismatic leadership of Gandhi, these diversities disappeared and their place was occupied by the Gandhian programmes and policies that increasingly dominated the scene and Gandhi became the torch bearer of the anti imperialist struggle. Yet ideological political groups along with their differences remained. Pertinently there were three groups who differed with the Congress and its philosophy. The Communists were led by Communist Party of India, Muslims led by *Khaksaras* and Muslim League, and the Hindutva led by the Hindu Mahasabha and RSS. This apart, the Socialist group, as a surrogate Congress stood separately for a while to be finally co-opted by the Congress.

While Communists, League and Mahasabha had identified their common enemy in the continued dominance of Congress in leading anti imperialist movement, sometimes they grudgingly cooperated with the Congress in its fight against the foreign rule. However, their primary plank was against the Congress, its programmes and policies and methods being pursued against imperialism. This engendered multiple narratives in anti imperialist struggle, each group holding their distinct ideological positions tightly. In the midst of such cross cutting multi polarity Dr. Hedgewar presented a counter narrative, emphasizing the significance of the historical moment of achieving freedom of the

country. He showed extraordinary maturity and pragmatism in not opposing Congress when the freedom of the country was of paramount importance. A true visionary does not follow the course of history too rigidly not to relent but makes enough space to accommodate something vital and crucial.

The freedom struggle soon became synonymous with the existence and identity of the Indian nation. Dr. Hedgewar therefore, was all for cooperating in the fight against British imperialism. Before founding the Sangh, he had been intensively involved first with armed revolutionaries and then as a Congress worker taking active part in its agitations. Yet, his outlook and nature did not undergo any drastic change when he created a new organization based on a distinct ideology and immersed himself in the task of imparting an all-India character to it. Hedgewar's humility, broadmindedness in the interests of the nation and unshakeable willpower are without parallel in the history of our freedom movement.

Complete Independence

The Sangh's *shakhas* might appear to the people just a variant of gymnasiums or *akhada* but in reality patriotic indoctrination was its core concern. This was reflected in pre patterned games, norms, songs and internal discourses at the *shakha*. Dr. Hedgewar was convinced that without *swaraj*, cultural regeneration of India was not possible. His emphasis on *swaraj* also led a debate on real purpose of the formation of the RSS. A minority opinion has been that Dr. Hedgewar had founded the Sangh solely with the purpose of attaining freedom [1] but most do not agree with this assessment. Dattopant Thengdi observes, "Dr. Hedgewar was preparing the Sangh to work for attaining independence, but his goal was to establish India as a strong and prosperous nation. And accomplishing that task was not possible without attaining freedom".

Right from the beginning, the *Sanghshakhas* and training classes used to organize intellectual programmes and sports replete

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1 Devendra Swarup ,a historian , subscribes to this argument

with patriotic fervour and content. There was a training camp of one hundred *swayam sevaks* at Wardha in April, 1929. All speakers at this camp appealed to the *swayam sevaks* to be ready to sacrifice their all in order to attain independence and announced that the ultimate goal of the Sangh was the attainment of independence. Dr. Hedgewar said,

> "The British government has promised to give independence to India on many occasions, but these have turned out to be false promises. It has now become amply clear that Bharat shall attain independence on her own strength. Ireland has rejected Britain's suzerainty over itself. British rulers colonized India by force. Every Indian, irrespective of the religion he follows is Hindu and our free rule shall be Hindu in character. Those who do not take part in the struggle for freedom are condemnable. All Indians are Hindus and it is their responsibility to work for attaining freedom".

Hedgewar's dedication to the Congress organization and its programmes remained undiminished even after the formation of the Sangh. He did not think to disassociate with the Congress. He and his close associate Harikrishna (Appaji) Joshi were elected members of the provincial Congress Committee. They remained in the Committee till the end of 1928. Dr. Hedgewar had an important role in the determination and implementation of programmes in the Provincial Congress Committee. On January 30, 1927, the Nagpur city Congress organized a meeting to oppose the government's decision to send the army to China. The meeting passed a resolution against the government. The resolution was placed in the meeting by Sangh leader L.V. Paranjpe. The resolution read, "This meeting appeals to all Indian citizens to resist the government's use of Indian citizens for its military objectives, through all proper means like demonstrations, propaganda and resolutions." This resolution was prepared by Dr. Hedgewar.

Opposing the Simon Commission

The boycott of the Simon Commission appointed by the British government in 1928 was an important anti-imperialist

movement after the Non-cooperation Movement. At its Banaras Session, the Congress had decided to boycott the Simon Commission and observe an all-India strike in protest. In the Marathi-speaking areas of the Central Provinces, Joshi was the General Secretary of the Congress and Dr. Hedgewar a member of its Working Committee. He was assigned the task of propagating the anti-Simon Commission message and awakening people for the movement. Till then, the Sangh had eighteen shakhas in and around Nagpur. The Congress proposed to hold a meeting to demonstrate its opposition to the Simon Commission. The resolution at this meeting read: "Hindus and Muslims of this country must unite to give a befitting reply to imperial forces". However, when the Simon Commission visited the Central Provinces and Berar in 1929, "owing to differing political outlook, while Hindu leaders flatly refused to cooperate with the Commission, the Muslim leaders welcomed its visit".[2] The Sangh too participated in the anti-Simon Commission agitation. Dr. Hedgewar instructed the Sangh's *swayam sewaks* to work through the platform of the Congress. He himself had the responsibility of propagating and spreading the activities of this particular agitation.

January 26, 1930

Relations between the Congress and the Sangh had begun to sour at the local level. Some prominent Congressmen had begun leveling false and concocted accusations at the Sangh. When Dr. Hedgewar was informed of this, he wrote on August 24, 1929: "I had anticipated this. We have to think beyond these circumstances. Let us pray to the Almighty that He grants them wisdom. Even after carrying out our duty in accordance with our reasoning and intellect, if there arises opposition to us or some consider it their task to oppose the Sangh, what indeed can we do?"

Clearly, the Congress was not happy at the expansion of the Sangh's network and its independent leadership. However, Dr.

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2 *Administrative Report of the Central Provinces and Berar;* 1931-32; Vol-II; Government Printing Press, Nagpur, 1933; p 9.

Hedgewar did not attach any importance to these controversies in the wider context of the national question. The Congress passed a historic resolution at its Lahore Session in December 1929. The resolution declared *Poorna Swaraj* (complete independence) to be the party's goal and instructed that January 26, 1930 (a Sunday) be celebrated as Independence Day throughout the country. Dr. Hedgewar had an inkling of this and expressed his happiness at this turn of events. He accepted the Congress decision to celebrate January 26 as a day of independence as the Sangh's decision too and implemented it in the organization. This was the first important instruction sent to the *shakhas* of the Sangh after its formation. Dr. Hedgewar wrote in his letter on January 21, 1930:

> "The Congress has declared 'independence' to be its goal and the Congress Working Committee has announced that January 26, 1930 be celebrated as 'independence day' throughout the country. It is but natural that all of us should feel heartened that this all-India national body has come close to its goal of independence. It is therefore, our duty to cooperate with any organization that works keeping this purpose foremost. Therefore, all *shakhas* of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh should organize the gathering of all their *swayam sevaks* at six 'o clock in the evening and salute the national flag, which is the saffron flag. The true meaning of independence and how to present its goal must form the essence of the talk given to *swayam sevaks*. Since we have accepted this goal of the Congress, the party must be congratulated for it. The report of this programme must be sent to us."

Dr. Hedgewar did not allow the one-sided opposition to the Sangh by Congress to affect his *swayam sevaks*. In his written communiqué, he accepted the Congress to be an 'all-India' and 'national' body. He opined that the basis for cooperation between the Congress and the Sangh was the unity of purpose, its similarity and purity, not the similarity of organization or leadership. Making support for independence conditional was selfish and unwise, according to him. The Sangh's *shakhas* organized on the evening of January 26, 1930 were the most effective programmes in the

Marathi-speaking areas of the Central Provinces. The RSS proved that for it, national interest was above that of the organization.

Civil Disobedience Movement

The lethargy that had crept into the national movement after the suspension of the Non-cooperation Movement had completely vanished by 1928-29. The Congress under Mahatma Gandhi was ready to launch another anti-imperialist agitation. The Lahore Session of the Congress authorized the All India Congress Committee to launch a new agitation. The AICC met at Sabarmati in February 1930 and authorized Gandhiji to lead and direct this movement. Mahatma Gandhi began his agitation, known as the Civil Disobedience with the breaking of Salt Law with his followers at Dandi on April 6, 1930.

The agitation in the Marathi zone of the Central Provinces began three days later, on April 9; salt laws were broken here as well. But it failed to generate any significant effect. The government did not arrest the *satyagrahis* and kept deferring any potential conflict. The Provincial Congress Committee therefore, requested the inclusion of a Jungle Satyagraha to make the movement more consequential, to which the All India Congress Committee agreed. There were 19,618 square miles of forests under the Forest Department in the Central Provinces. The provincial government had obtained Rs.51, 11,944 in revenue in 1930-31. After a total expenditure of Rs.39, 60,430, there was a saving of Rs.11, 51,514. Total savings for the year 1929-30 had been Rs.20, 21,566. The Congress, therefore, targeted the revenue of the provincial government through its Jungle Satyagraha. It wished to break government laws by cutting grass and trees in restricted government forest areas.

The influence of the Civil Disobedience Movement had begun spreading, and the mental readiness on the part of the Sangh to take part in the activities under Gandhi's leadership was already there. The following quote from Dr. Moonje's diary illustrates the then prevailing atmosphere inside the Sangh: "In the evening, I addressed the members of the RSS who had come here from the villages for training during the summer vacation. I said to them that

ideal of the Sangh is to make India a Hindu state and Swaraj to be the Hindu Raj just as Swaraj in Afghanistan means Muslim and Afghan Raj. I spoke for about an hour but could gauge from the faces of these boys I addressed, that they were hardly appreciative of my speech. Perhaps Mahatma Gandhi's movement of attaining independence by the Civil Disobedience Movement was dominating the minds of those present to a large extent, or perhaps my speech wasn't all that good".[3]

Swayam sevaks began participating in the movement from the beginning, but the movement reached its apogee when Dr. Hedgewar decided to enter the fray himself along with other *swayam sevaks*. A meeting had been called in November 1929 at Nagpur to determine the role of the Sangh in the changing political situation of the country. The three-day meeting had collectively resolved that the Sangh would support the movement announced by the Congress fully and without conditions. The Sangh had a total of 37 shakhas by the end of 1929. Wardha grew as the next important centre of the Sangh after Nagpur, with 12 shakhas. The RSS had 52 shakhas by the middle of 1930, and *swayam sevaks* now numbered two and a half thousand, in which young *sevaks* were about seven or eight hundred.

It is therefore clear that the decision by the Sangh to support this movement was not something made in haste or under any pressure. Dr. Hedgewar used to think and determine the Sangh's plans months in advance, which then became a norm of the organization. The Sangh's outlook regarding this movement and its evaluation is clear from the following excerpt from Dr. Hedgewar's own speech: "Let us not be in any illusion that the present battle is the final battle for *Swarajya* and it will deliver freedom from foreign yoke. There will be a decisive battle after this movement and we should prepare to plunge into it, sacrificing everything that we have".

Hedgewar had realized through his own experiences in 1920-21 that mobilisation for the movement should not be done by

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3 *Moonje Papers*, Private Diary; June 3, 1930, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

making euphoric claims to workers, which yields only undesirable results. The Non-cooperation Movement had boasted of achieving "Swarajya within one year", which had, no doubt, generated a lot of exuberance, but its failure only produced frustration, despondency and bitterness. He therefore appealed to the *swayam sevaks* that they should involve people in political agitations only after thoroughly understanding the nature and purpose of the agitation.

The nature of the Sangh's participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement still was not clear in the minds of *swayam sevaks*. Many were of the view that participation under the saffron flag, in full Sangh uniform would enable the Sangh to maintain and enhance its identity. Dr. Hedgewar resolved this issue by declaring: "*Swayam sevaks*, who want to participate in the movement, are free to do so, with the permission of the *Sanghchalak*. All *swayam sevaks* should be allowed to join the movement without any hitch". He wanted that the anti-imperialist movement should be fought on one platform, under a single flag, banner and programme. Participating under the Sangh's banner, flag and leadership would mean "giving rise to unnecessary controversies". Therefore, without getting into any ideological debate, Hedgewar advised his *swayam sevaks* that they should be prepared to "wholeheartedly identify themselves with the movement". He personally provided an example of this.

Ideal Initiative

A special conference was organized in Nagpur on the occasion of the *guru dakshina* ceremony on July 12, 1930, in accordance with the Sangh's plans. The Sangh's well-wishers and *swayam sevaks* were present in large numbers. It was there that Dr L.V. Paranjpe announced in his address that Dr. Hedgewar along with his associates would be proceeding to take part in the Jungle Satyagraha. Paranjpe further said, "Those who wish to participate in this agitation may do so voluntarily, but others must stay back to help in the work of this fledgling organization (i.e. the Sangh). There is no doubt that the present agitation is one that will take the nation forward on the path of freedom. Along with it, it is also necessary to organize those ready to sacrifice everything in the battle that lies ahead".

Dr. Hedgewar spoke briefly at the end of the ceremony. The example he presented was perhaps never put forth by any other organization in the freedom movement.The communists, instead of strengthening the movement, were always looking for an opportunity to infiltrate the Congress and capture its leadership. In fact, they were successful too, in capturing the local bodies of the Congress. The socialists formed a separate clique within the Congress. Both the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League were imperious in their organizational structure and also considered themselves the sole representatives of their respective religious communities. Dr. Hedgewar on the other hand, neither allowed the Sangh to be dissolved under the pretext of participating in national agitations, nor did he permit a divided consciousness to take root within the Sangh. He participated in the Congress-led agitation purely as a Satyagrahi. Hedgewar said in his historic address:

> "After I sit down expressing my thanks, I shall not continue to be the *Sarsanghchalak*. Dr. Paranjpe has agreed to take on the responsibilities of heading the organization. On behalf of the Sangh, we heartily thank him for that. Those of us who are participating in this movement are doing so in our individual capacity. There is absolutely no change in the method and functioning of the Sangh. Our ideology is intact. It is necessary for any organization working for the goal of the country's freedom to acquire the intrinsic and outer knowledge of all agitations and movements in the country and to utilize such knowledge for its work."

In 1921, while going to jail, Dr. Hedgewar had refused to consider the eagerness at going to prison as a substitute for patriotism. He was of the view that one should court prison only when absolutely necessary; else, one ought to work for the country's freedom remaining free. He mentioned this aspect once during his address:

> "Today, jail-going has become synonymous with patriotism. But ask people, eager to spend two years in jail to take two years off from their family responsibilities and work for an organization dedicated to the nation's freedom,

and we find no one willing to do so. Why is this so? It seems people are not willing to understand the fact that the country's freedom will not be attained by a mere six months or so of participation, but only by working in a committed, focused manner for an organization for years together. The destiny of the country cannot change unless we eschew this momentary patriotism and resolve to live for the sake of the nation and work for a dedicated organization. The Sangh's objective is to instil this resolve in the youth and organize them for doing so".

Pusad Satyagraha

On July 14, 1930, a batch of volunteers under Dr. Hedgewar's leadership left Nagpur for the Jungle Satyagraha. An enormous crowd had gathered at the Nagpur railway station, prominent among them were acting *Sarsanghchalak* Dr. Paranjape, advocate Balasaheb Dhable and barrister Govindrao Deshmukh.

Hundreds of people gathered at the stations and many of them joined Dr. Hedgewar's retinue of Satyagrahis. Upon reaching Wardha on July 15, they were welcomed by hundreds of people; local Sangh leaders and *swayam sevaks* joined them from here too, including Narayanrao Deshmukh, Trayambakrao Deshpande, Appaji Joshi, Balasaheb Dhable, editor of the *Maharashtra,* Dadarao Parmarth, Vitthalrao Deo, Bhaiyaji Kumbhalwar, Arvi K. Ambade, Palewar of Chanda among others. The batch of satyagrahis reached Pusad on July 16. Dr. Hedgewar addressed a large gathering at Yavatmal on July 17. The 'War Council' constituted for the agitation had fixed July 21 for Hedgewar's satyagraha. All leaders accompanying Hedgewar were given directions by the 'War Council' to lead different batches of satyagrahis.

The first phase of this jungle satyagraha led by M.S. Aney did not meet with the expected success. Many prominent leaders had led the satyagraha batches for about a week and therefore, the agitation had to be suspended after a week. The 'War Council' had decided to launch the second phase of the satyagraha on July 21,

which was led by Dr. Hedgewar. After T.S. Bapat's announcement in this regard, it was mentioned in the police report that "the Pusad Satyagraha was not successful. But the second phase of the agitation which is slated to take place four miles away from Yavatmal on July 21 is very likely to be successful".

On the morning of July 21, *swayam sevaks* who had assembled at the grounds of the Nagpur Bhavan carried out the customary salutation to the flag (*Dhwaj Vandan*) and then proceeded to the cotton market from there. There were about three to four thousand people with Dr. Hedgewar at the outset, and this crowd kept increasing as he proceeded. The number of satyagrahis grew to about ten thousand by the time they reached the spot where satyagraha was to be offered, which also included seven to eight hundred women. People proceeded to the battlefield on foot, by car, cycles and bullock carts. The multitude of people that accompanied Dr. Hedgewar proved right the assessment and the forecast of the police.

All senior officials of the police and the forest department were present at the satyagraha site. Dr. Hedgewar and his batch were arrested as soon as they broke the 'jungle laws'. Hedgewar went into police custody after appealing to his companions and followers to continue with the satyagraha and a case was registered against him on the evening of July 21. Justice Bharuche pronounced a sentence of nine months' rigorous imprisonment on him, which also included three months rigorous imprisonment under Section 379 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The police and administration were perturbed at the success of this phase of the satyagraha led by Dr. Hedgewar and were apprehensive that it might take a more radical turn. This was the reason for handing out a much harsher sentence to him as compared to the other agitators. A single magistrate had pronounced two separate punishments for one offence on a single day. Whereas Hedgewar was sentenced to nine months of harsh imprisonment, the other eleven satyagrahis arrested along with him were given simple imprisonment of four months each. Regarding the satyagraha led by Dr. Hedgewar, the police report said: "The sentence passed on Dr. Hedgewar has had a satisfactory effect and no other leader of prominence has since

come forward to offer satyagraha". A huge rally was organized at Nagpur in his support. The grass cut by Hedgewar during his satyagraha at Yavatmal was brought to Nagpur and was sprinkled on the shakha's flag after the report on the satyagraha was read out. The Congress too, organized its own rally on July 21 in Hedgewar's support.

Agitation Sharpens

Though there was no immediate effect of Dr. Hedgewar's imprisonment on the Congress of the province, the Sangh's *swayam sevaks* began participating even more vigorously in the ongoing satyagraha, which began taking different hues even as the Sangh's influence spread. The first outcome of this could be seen at liquor outlets which had been picketed. *Swayam sewaks* had launched an intense campaign in Nagpur for prohibition. During the 1920-21 Non-cooperation Movement too, this particular programme had been quite successful in Nagpur and in 1931 liquor sales went down by 60 per cent as a result of this agitation. The Sangh's role in anti-government agitations during 1930-32 could not be ignored.[4]

The reading of proscribed literature too was a part of the Civil Disobedience Movement. Sangh workers in Nagpur would read out such literature at public meetings and then court arrest. Sangh *Sarkaryavah* G.M. Huddar too was involved in this programme. At one such public meeting in Nagpur, Huddar read out excerpts from the banned books of Mazzini and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, openly challenging the police and administration before courting arrest. [5] Nagpur *Sanghchalak* Appasaheb Halde, freed from his responsibility now assumed the role of the dictator of the 'War Council' and then went to jail for participating in the jungle satyagraha.

The *Sanghchalak* of Sirpur, Baburao Vaidya too, courted arrest. Martand Jog, who held the responsibility of the *Senapati* in

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4 *Fortnightly Report;* Central Provinces and Berar, second half of July 1932; F.L/P&J/12/40, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

5 *Kesari;* December 9, 1938.

the Sangh, was made a 'captain' by the *swayam sewaks* of the 'War Council'. He also assumed the responsibility for publishing the Council's secret bulletin the *War Bulletin.* Jog along with other *swayam sewaks* was arrested at Talegaon, 60 kilometres from Nagpur on September 4, during the satyagraha. All were awarded four months' rigorous imprisonment. Jog's satyagraha too, drew thousands of people. Prominent Sangh leaders like Rambhau Wakhre, Vitthalrao Gadge and Sitaram Pant Mehkar led the satyagrahis. Mehkar was the in-charge of arrangements in the Sangh camp at Yavatmal, and courted arrest along with many other *swayam sevaks*. [6] Ambadas Narayan, Vishnu Govind Ghotkar, Vitthal Bhamji Lohan and other *swayam sevaks* too received rigorous prison sentences of four months each. [7]

The Sangh also set up a service centre for first aid by training its *swayam sevaks* for the same. This particular cell had 100 volunteers and played an important role during the satyagraha in the Central Provinces. *Swayam sevak* teams used to move along with demonstrations, processions. First aid was administered to the hurt or wounded satyagrahis who bore the brunt of police repression, or fainted due to fatigue or weakness. The police resorted to brutal force on satyagrahis at Nagpur on September 9, in which dozens were injured. All of them were treated at the clinic of acting *Sarsanghchalak* Dr Paranjpe. When the 'Garhwal Diwas' was celebrated in the entire province a month prior to that, clashes between the police and agitators continued throughout the night. This Sangh cell had then assisted the agitators, working round the clock.

During Dushera, 1930 an essay titled "O Mind! Thou Hast no Right to Rest!" was read at all the *shakhas* of the Sangh. Immersed in the spirit of patriotism, the essence of this essay was: "Till the Motherland is not freed of the chains of bondage and the nation does not become strong and prosperous, we have no right to aspire for any happiness of our own. It is an unworthy and lowly offspring that hankers after material happiness leaving its mother in

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6 *Kesari;* August 2, 1930 and July 22, 1930; p2.
7 *Ibid.*

sorrow, dishonour and enslavement. Real happiness is in breaking these chains and freeing the nation".

Dr. Hedgewar ultimately proved, through his own actions and that of his organization, that patriotism flows more in a nation's cultural consciousness than in its political perceptions. Thus, the spirit of commitment to the freedom movement that was manifest in the Sangh's non-political form was indicative of its futuristic role.

Second Incarceration

Dr. Hedgewar's incarceration was not merely a headline in local newspapers but it entailed strong mobilisation against the British imperialism. RSS workers in the Central Provinces and other parts of the country began to cultivate grounds for the ouster of the British. Reaction to his arrest spread far and wide throughout the Central Provinces. When he was being taken to Akola by train, people thronged nearly every station to greet him. The crowd at Darwha station on the Yavatmal-Mutrajapur route was so thick that the platform became a de facto rally ground. Over 1,200 people had gathered there. An impromptu platform was hurriedly set up on the railway platform and Darwha's Congress workers under the leadership of Dau met Dr Hedgewar on the train and implored him to address the gathering. The police were helpless amidst this multitude and had to give permission to Hedgewar to ascend the platform.

Dr Hedgewar's address to the crowd was brief but inspiring. He said: "We had launched the Non-cooperation Movement against the British a decade ago. Today, we are out to make a mockery of colonial laws. The government is mistaken if it thinks that its repression will frighten the people. The entire history of our country is one of conflict between *dharma* (virtue) and *adharma* (evil). We don't have to learn the concept of law or justice from the British. What they term as laws are the chains of our enslavement. What they describe as disorder is but a signal of the times to come. Compromise or negotiation is not the solution to the problem of imperialist domination. Those who have captured this nation by deceit are actually demonic in nature. Just as the demon (Ravan) who kidnapped Sita met his doom, the same fate awaits the British regime here if it does not leave India in time."

Hedgewar's resounding address filled the air with nationalist sentiment and he was seen off with a victorious roar of 'Vande Mataram'. The police officials were incensed at his anti-government stance and speeches, and did not in the least like his addressing huge crowds at every turn. Also, they were apprehensive of disciplinary action being taken for failing to check his rising popularity. One police officer now ordered handcuffs to be put on Dr Hedgewar. This led to a heated exchange of words between Hedgewar and the police officials. The *Sarsanghchalak* was accustomed to observing norms of decency, but was also an individual of supreme self-esteem, courage, strength and fearlessness. He stood up, tall and defiant, before the police and dared them to handcuff him. All hell broke out among the satyagrahis accompanying Hedgewar and the police was forced to withdraw its order. Dr Hedgewar continued to accept the greetings of supporters throughout his train journey.

Life in Prison

This was Dr Hedgewar's second time in prison. He was assigned a 'B' class while satyagrahis of his batch were placed in the 'C' category of prisoners. Hedgewar was kept in solitary confinement in a cell hundred feet long and thirty feet wide for seven whole days. Afterwards, S.H. Ballal of Yavatmal was put in the same cell along with him. Later, Rajeshwarrao Deshmukh and Dadasaheb Soman from Mehkar's Sangh *shakha* joined them from August 18. Deshmukh later wrote: “it was the Monday of the dark half of the month of Shravan, a day that brought the most important moment of my life. I saw the highly respected Dr Hedgewar sitting in front of me as soon as I entered. I had never imagined that I would get the opportunity to stay with the founder of the Sangh. I was delighted and even forgot my sadness at having been separated from my aged parents and little children”.Later, the number of 'B' class political prisoners grew to 35.

No Plea for Leniency

Jail Officer Ford had been at the Ajni jail during Dr Hedgewar's first prison term too and therefore, knew him rather well. Ford was also a bit sympathetic to India's freedom struggle.

He was also appreciative of Dr Hedgewar's intense nationalism and his courteous and restrained demeanour even in prison, and respected Hedgewar a lot. Knowing this, when the 'B' category prisoners wanted Hedgewar to approach Ford with a request for better food, clothing and facility of lodging, Hedgewar replied, " I know Ford will accede to my request. He is a good officer, but is after all a representative of the colonial regime. Asking anything of him would be akin to pleading for favours from British imperialism. We have entered the fray for battle; if we wanted to enjoy material comforts, what was the need for us to venture out on the path of satyagraha?"

Another incident brings out Dr Hedgewar's avowed nationalism. Appaji Joshi was a well-known Congress leader of the province, apart from being a Sangh leader. He had also been a Congress functionary till 1928. Joshi was also involved in other social activities of the province. Considering his deteriorating health, Ford wished to shift him to the 'B' category and requested him to submit a written application to this effect. Appaji kept postponing the matter and finally, Ford asked him to consult Hedgewar on this. Hedgewar told Appaji: "You have been a Congress secretary. Of course, there is nothing untoward in making such an application, but the responsibility of maintaining the sanctity of the agitation in which you have plunged and reached jail as a result is also yours".

Appaji decided not to submit the application and continued in his 'C' class cell despite his illness. The administration however, shifted him to the 'B' category cell in view of his ill-health which deteriorated even further.

Dr Hedgewar was of the view that whichever organization one belonged to, or agitation one participated in, one had to respect its boundaries, principles, norms and discipline. The Non-cooperation Movement had to be abandoned as it could not remain true to its avowed principles. He also said that "it was the failure to recognize the values of nationalism that led religious fanatics to commit atrocities on Hindus during the Moplah riots". This was also the reason for Hedgewar appealing to his followers to strictly adhere to nonviolence after he was arrested at Yavatmal. He said,

"This is not the first, nor the final day of our struggle against the British rule. The repression of the British administration is only indicative of how unpopular alien rule is, how apprehensive it has become and the extent to which it opposes our freedom. We have to ponder how a handful of people have been able to enslave us. Independence cannot be won through the enthusiasm or excitement of one day. Those who have not gone to jail should come forward to carry on the work of the organization and ready themselves for the battles ahead".

Gandhi's instructions were that jail rules and orders had to be complied with. Despite egregious conditions in prison, Dr Hedgewar and his associates maintained their discipline. The similarity in the practical approaches of Dr Hedgewar and Gandhi was also apparent to all. Upon the inmates of the 'C' category cell being treated in an inhuman manner, the inmates of both 'C' and 'B' cells went on a hunger strike. Dr Hedgewar also organized a 'Garhwal Day' inside the jail premises and all satyagrahis kept a day's fast following his appeal.

The jail authorities had to keep a hawk-eyed watch on Dr Hedgewar because of strict orders from above. When this was made public, Dr Moonje visited the jail on July 29 to meet him and later wrote: "Though they (the swayamsewaks) are made to toil very hard, they appear happy. All are in jail uniform and complain that they are treated harshly following orders from higher authorities. Inspector General Jathar had come to this jail but Dr Hedgewar said that he paid no attention to the instruction. I asked War Council dictator Shriram to pass a resolution in protest against this".

Connecting With People

Dr Hedgewar had another unique quality that of connecting with the people. He could convert arguments into debates and make people join his cause by invoking their positive aspects and qualities. He continued doing so even within the jail. Among political prisoners, there were some who considered the Sangh to be communal and violent. Dr Hedgewar used to listen to them patiently and then present the Sangh's viewpoint on nation, culture,

society, country, Mahatma Gandhi and the armed struggle for freedom. After many misconceptions about the Sangh were cleared, Dr Hedgewar started the morning Sangh prayer in the jail. After their release from jail, many of those whose opinions he had won over directly joined the Sangh.

Dr Hedgewar used to obtain information about ongoing political developments in prison too. The Sangh's office-bearers used to keep him abreast of the organization's progress. Dr Paranjpe and Bhaurao Kulkarni were in the forefront of this task.

Two developments in this phase greatly troubled Dr. Hedgewar. He highly disapproved of Dr Moonje's decision to participate in the Round Table Conference in London, even as the freedom struggle was still on. However, when Moonje's political opponents caricatured him as a 'rhinoceros', Dr. Hedgewar disapproved of this low level of lampooning as well.

In this period, the Sangh suffered a great indignity, which agitated Hedgewar. After Huddar's release from jail, he was involved in political banditry in Balaghat and was again arrested in January 1931. Huddar was among the topmost leaders of the Sangh. It was amidst all these developments that Dr Hedgewar was released from jail on February 14, 1931. He was welcomed at Akola, Wardha, and other places and reached Nagpur on February 17. A grand procession was organized in his welcome and he reassumed the responsibility of the *Sarsanghchalak* the same day.

Hindu Mahasabha, RSS and Congress

The Sangh continued to gain in strength during Dr Hedgewar's lifetime and its all-India character too started becoming apparent to all. With the spread of its arc of influence, political ambitions among the politicians in the Central Provinces and other parts of the country too began cropping up. These worthies failed to recognize the Sangh as an ideological movement, the sight of uniformed *swayam sevaks* marching and working in perfect discipline and commitment was the only attraction for them. Along with the Hindu Mahasabha, Congress leaders too wanted to use the enviable Sangh organization and cadre for the furtherance of their own political mileage.

Hedgewar in the Mahasabha

Dr Hedgewar joined the Hindu Mahasabha's activities after its branch in Nagpur was opened in 1923 (the Hindu Mahasabha was founded in 1916). He was nominated as a member of the party's 14-member 'publicity committee'. Raja Laskhmanrao Bhonsale and Dr Moonje were its president and secretary respectively. Dr Hedgewar was made the secretary of the Nagpur unit of the Mahasabha in 1926, a post he served till the following year, i.e., 1927. Yet, he was less active compared to the two earlier secretaries of the Mahasabha, Udaram Pehalwan and Gopalrao Dalvi. In fact, Dr Hedgewar used to be mostly absent from the party's meetings.

Dr Hedgewar's views on the Mahasabha and the Congress were quite clear. He accepted the all-India nature and influence of the Congress and believed that it was the most widely accepted platform for any anti-imperialist struggle. He was against ideological differences leading to the creation of different

platforms, which would only weaken the anti-imperialist struggle. He wished that other organizations engaged in the fight against imperialism should utilize the Cóngress platform without conditions. Dr Hedgewar himself used to participate in agitation or constructive endeavours without any prejudices. He did not expect reciprocity or gratitude from the Congress for this, and wished to see the same sentiment in other organizations too. Hedgewar did not consider the Hindu Mahasabha to be an alternative of the Congress. He believed the Mahasabha's activities for Hindu interests at various levels to be of rather limited utility.

The Hindu Mahasabha began veering increasingly towards solely political concerns, at the expense of issues of socio-cultural reforms and Hindu unity. It began to propagate itself as the sole representative of Hindus, much along the lines of the Muslim League. As a result, the gulf between Dr Hedgewar and the Mahasabha now began to widen. His ties to the Mahasabha were more or less symbolic from 1927 onwards and in 1930; his links to the party remained confined solely to his personal ties with Mahasabha leaders. The Hindu Mahasabha did receive organizational and manpower support from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh owing to ideological similarities between the two and Hedgewar's personal regard for the leaders of the Mahasabha.

Confusion regarding relations between the Sangh and the Mahasabha arose because of the fact that during Sangh's early days it had sought and received the cooperation of Mahasabha leaders to set up its organization at new places. Dattopant Thengdi writes in this regard: "Dr Hedgewar had received help from Hindutvawadi leaders when the work of the Sangh began, the purpose of which was to establish the Sangh at newer places. This was his organizational strategy. Many of those Mahasabha leaders whose help he sought were actually made *sanghchalaks* at various places".

Despite this close relationship, Dr Hedgewar took care to maintain the Sangh's autonomy right from the day of its founding, and did not permit any encroachment upon this particular objective of his. He would arrive at a decision on all important organizational

issues only after due consultation with his colleagues. Many instances of this were available. Hedgewar never kept the RSS dependent on the Hindu Mahasabha for policies and programmes, and neither did he involve the Mahasabha leaders in this process. The first instance of this policy approach of Dr Hedgewar became apparent during the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930. The Hindu Mahasabha itself did not have a single opinion on the issue. A sizeable faction, whose reins were in Bhai Parmanand's hands, was totally opposed to Mahatma Gandhi. Another faction, which included Dr Moonje too, did take part in the movement but kept alive its objections to Gandhi and his policies. Dr Moonje was arrested on July 11, 1930 while offering satyagraha and was soon released on a bail of Rs. 5. The Sangh, however, made its decision after evaluating the national situation. Dr Hedgewar was unaware and unaffected by the doings and dilemmas of the Hindu Mahasabha. The involvement of the RSS in the Civil Disobedience Movement was total and without preconditions.

Mahasabha's Expectations

The Hindu Mahasabha passed a resolution in 1932 accepting the all-India character of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh. The resolution praised Dr Hedgewar. The Hindu Mahasabha considered itself to be the axis of all Hindu politics and expected the Sangh to work as its voluntary body and extend help to its growing manpower for the Mahasabha's benefit. The Mahasabha leaders loathed the Sangh's participation in any Congress programme. They envied the Sangh's *swayam sevaks* and coveted their cadres for their own meetings, conferences programmes and publicity.

The attitude of the Hindu Mahasabha towards the Sangh is evident from this letter of Dr Hedgewar written to Kashinath Limaye, a Sangh leader. Dr Hedgewar wrote that the Mahasabha leaders needed to understand that the Sangh's *swayam sevaks* were not there to move tables and chairs and carry out other such tasks for the Mahasabha. He further wrote, "Things may continue in their present vein owing to circumstances, for there seems to be little other alternative. I well know that conditions there (i.e. in the

Mahasabha) are extremely distressing for our *swayam sevaks* and this constantly pains my heart".

When Dr Hedgewar drew clear lines between the two organizations, acrimony towards him and the RSS began to arise in the Hindu Mahasabha. This found expression in mutual discussions, which sometimes also spilled over into the public arena. In 1934, Dr Moonje complained to G.V. Deshmukh, one of Dr Hedgewar's close associates that the Sangh was not cooperating in the least with the Hindu Mahasabha.[1] So much so that even a person of Veer Savarkar's stature, criticized the Sangh's 'neutrality' vis-à-vis the Hindu Mahasabha at a public meeting at Panvel. It was at this meeting that Savarkar launched an aside at the Sangh, saying: "The tale of the Sangh's *swayam sevak* will be that he was born, enrolled himself in the Sangh and passed away without achieving anything". After Savarkar's quip, the middle and lower rung leaders of the Mahasabha only intensified their verbal attacks on the Sangh. Madhav Bindu Puranik, Nathuram Godse, Veer Yashwantrao Joshi and G.G. Adhikari were prominent among those who vented their ire on the Sangh. Puranik, in fact, in conjunction with Godse, Joshi and the princely house of Solapur even wrote to Savarkar, severely criticizing the Sangh. They especially targeted the Sangh leadership, alleging "they (the Sangh's leaders) deliberately prevent members from working for the Mahasabha. According to them, the Hindu Mahasabha is merely a conglomerate of leaders, who are personally ambitious but disgruntled because they haven't been able to acquire positions or places of respect in the Congress. The Sangh cunningly uses us in order to further its own interests".

Bhaganagar Satyagraha

The Hindu Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj launched a joint satyagraha against the Nizam of Hyderabad in October 1938 for his anti-Hindu policies. This agitation was led by Veer Savarkar himself. The Mahasabha expected that Dr Hedgewar should

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1 G.V. Deshmukh; *Kal Samudrateel Ratne,* Veena Prakashan, Nagpur; p155-157.

participate in the Bhaganagar Satyagraha with the same intensity and commitment as he had displayed in his participation in the Jungle Satyagraha. The Sangh and its scope of work had grown manifold from 1930 to 1937. The Mahasabha, in fact, was indirectly reliant on the Sangh. Dr Hedgewar was more concerned about the larger question of the country's freedom, and did not wish to fritter away the Sangh's energies and strength on immediate issues. The enthusiasm he felt for any anti-imperialist agitation or movement could not be replicated in these kinds of agitations. Hedgewar could not bring himself to be active in these, though he was undoubtedly sympathetic to the cause. He empathized with the issues of the Bhaganagar Satyagraha, but did not consider it to be suited to the final phase of the anti-imperialist struggle.

In the colonial era, the Sangh and the Mahasabha differed as far as the nature of their leaders and decision making process was concerned. Dr Hedgewar, for his part accorded due importance to the decision making process. He never thrust his decisions, opinions or programmes upon his *swayam sevaks*. The Sangh always laid stress on voluntary participation. In his reply to a Sangh functionary vide a letter written on November 12, 1937, regarding the Bhaganagar Satyagrah, Dr Hedgewar said: "It is impossible to prevent any member of the Sangh from taking part in their individual capacity in any organization or movement. But it shall be the responsibility of that member that the Sangh's work does not suffer on account of his actions".

In another letter, Dr Hedgewar had written that *swayam sevaks* could participate in this satyagraha in their individual capacities. The Sangh's participation in the Bhaganagar agitation was symbolic, with a team of a hundred *sevaks* under Bhaiyaji Dani taking part in it. Of course, it was futile to expect the Hindu Mahasabha to be satisfied with this. On the contrary, the ire of the Mahasabha towards the Sangh now reached its zenith. Dr Hedgewar was criticised in public for the first ever time. G.G. Adhikari, editor of the *Vande Mataram* published from Bombay, which was supported by the Mahasabha wrote a series of twelve articles in which he went so far as to label Dr Hedgewar as 'stubborn', 'vainglorious' and 'ambitious'. Hedgewar was accused

of not supporting a Hindu agitation and of dividing Hindus' power. What was even more troubling was that no Mahasabha leader stepped forward to refute these allegations against Hedgewar. However, there was severe reaction to this series of articles in the *Vande Mataram;* innumerable letters to the editor poured in from various parts of Maharashtra. The paper also faced boycott at many places. The *Sawdhan,* published from Nagpur in its edition of May 27 answered those who were criticizing the Sangh for not participating in the Bhaganagar agitation. It wrote:

> "If only G.G. Adhikari had knowledge of regular work and duties pertaining to certain occasions or circumstances, he wouldn't have unleashed these twelve salvos upon the Sangh. In the rather juvenile exhilaration of the Bhaganagar Satyagraha, he has forgotten that the task of attaining freedom of the nation still remains unaccomplished. At a juncture when one has to throw the final turn of the dice for the sake of the nation's freedom, preparations for the same form part of everyday duty, whereas movements like the Bhaganagar Satyagraha can said to be its occasional embellishments. Organizations that do various tasks can also be different. But an organization that is dedicated to the long-term goal cannot afford to turn in the direction of other tasks or agitations that would invariably distract it from its main duty, dissipate its distinctiveness and divide its strength".

Babarao Savarkar too answered the Hindu Mahasabha's allegations. Supporting the Sangh's stand on the Bhaganagar Satyagraha, he wrote: "...those who have imbibed affection and pride for Hindutva and the nation because of the Sangh's inspiration can never deviate from their path of duty. They understand their duty better than most others do, and also fulfil it".

The Mahasabha's grouse, however, was not doused by such arguments. On June 17, 1939, Adhikari attacked Dr Hedgewar again, this time in rather cheap language. The *Vande Mataram* wrote: "We humbly wish to convey to Dr Hedgewar that the poison of ego is more devastating than that of a serpent. Don't ignore the recent history of the downfall of Gandhi, which was brought about

because of this very ego. No doubt, you have done a yeoman service to Hindu society by establishing the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh. But what can be done, if one who has built a pond for weary travellers himself lets loose ferocious creatures inside the same water? You are doing exactly this and doing so deliberately. Therefore, we implore you, please desist. If you persist in your present course, historians of the Hindu society will not even deem you worthy of mention".

Dr Hedgewar's simple and dignified reply to this cheap mudslinging against him is in itself an inspiration to anyone in public life. When this editorial laced with abuses was read out to him, he merely laughed it off and said: "I too wish the same. Never mind if my name does not find mention in history, but those who sling mud on the Sangh in this manner must find ample mention".

Dr Hedgewar's outlook, temperament and views were as broad as his goal was lofty. This was the reason why he concentrated his energies, time and efforts on his work and left it to history to answer his critics. The same Adhikari who vented his ire against him became Hedgewar's admirer after the latter's passing in 1940, and even published a book on him containing his speeches. Truly, those who influence the course of civilizations are themselves the picture of patience, fortitude and unshakeable resolve. When Vinayakrao Apte decided to embark on the publication of a weekly called *Rashtradharma* to propagate the message of the Sangh, Dr Hedgewar wrote to him on November 10, 1937:

"There is no doubt that *Rashtradharma* will propagate our ideology, but you should never get into refuting allegations thrown at you. These days, newspapers of your region are levelling false allegations against the Sangh. Whether these allegations are published in newspapers or are spoken at public forums, we should not be getting into refuting them. Rather, we ought to ignore them completely".

Ram Sena

The Hindu Mahasabha began to become increasingly involved in electoral politics with each passing day. Its

organizational base, however, was practically zilch. The average Hindu was not prepared to jettison the Congress leadership and take to the Mahasabha. Hindus empathized with the Mahasabha, but the party lacked the organizational capability to draw them to it. Therefore, not unnaturally, the Hindu Mahasabha looked with both expectation and a sense of unspoken authority at the Sangh. Barely had the acrimony over participation in the Bhaganagar Satyagraha settled, the Mahasabha kicked up another controversy. In September 1939, it decided to set up a voluntary outfit called the 'Hindu Militia'. When Dr Moonje earnestly invited Dr Hedgewar to its meeting, the latter flatly ruled out the possibility of attending any meeting of this body. In his reply to Moonje's letter, Dr Hedgewar wrote on September 30, 1939:

"As my health is not in a state as to allow me to travel, I shall not be coming to Poona on October 8th. Even if you propose to hold your meeting at Nagpur, I shall be unable to attend it, because there is a meeting of Sangh workers there on the same day". Dr Hedgewar further advised Dr Moonje that "you should not associate my name with this 'Hindu Militia' anywhere". Dr Moonje, however, disregarded this request of Hedgewar and included his name in the 'Hindu Militia's appeal made to the public. Dr Hedgewar once again appealed to Dr Moonje not to drag his name into this and also disassociated himself from the strategic calculus of the Hindu Mahasabha.

Yet, the Mahasabha very much eyed Dr Hedgewar's unrivalled capability, his reputation and stature, not to mention his trustworthiness. Six months later, the Hindu Mahasabha established another organization called the Ram Sena, which was meant to be a parallel voluntary organization to the Sangh. The Ram Sena's activities were based on aggressive Hindutva, and its appeal too was based on this. The Hindu Mahasabha claimed the Sangh's indifference towards itself as the reason for founding the Ram Sena, which becomes amply clear from this comment on the issue: "The Dronāchārya (martial preceptor of the Kuru dynasty in the Mahabharata age) of Hindu military training, Dr Hedgewar has chosen to establish a neutral outfit at Nagpur". The first list of office-bearers of the Ram Sena released on March 1927 had Dr

Hedgewar's name too in it. Quite apparently, the Hindu Mahasabha was now transgressing all propriety in politics in its anxiety to spread its wings. Dr Hedgewar thought this move to be part of a plan and vociferously opposed it through the newspapers. When the Hindu Mahasabha was busy with these moves, Dr Hedgewar was recuperating at Rajgir in Bihar. He informed Golwalkar of this and asked the latter to publish his (Hedgewar's) objections to these one-sided declarations of the Hindu Mahasabha. The *Maharashtra* carried a refutation that "Dr Hedgewar's name has been associated with the Hindu Mahasabha without his knowledge and consent. He has nothing to do with it".

The Ram Sena wasn't the only such outfit. Mahasabha leaders floated many other outfits at the local level too, to counter the RSS. The *'Hindu Rashtra Dal', 'Shakti Dal', 'Hindu Sewa Dal'* and Nathuram Godse's *'Hindu Rashtra Sena'* were prominent among these. All these organizations were in disagreement with the Sangh's ideological outlook and practical approach.

After the founding of the Sangh, Dr Hedgewar had vowed to establish Hindu philosophy and outlook as the national way of life and supplant the narrow outlook among Hindus with nationalist feeling and sentiment. He therefore, took care to present the Hindus, Hindutva and the concept of the Hindu Rashtra in the most acceptable ways. He nurtured and developed the RSS along patriotism, worship of the Motherland, reverence for our ancestors and forebears and mental and spiritual affiliation to our culture and civilization. Hedgewar however, took care to avoid defining or demarcating these hoary concepts and terminologies in a hidebound manner. Rather, the expounding of Hindutva and nationalism through the medium of the Sangh itself became the new approach. The mutual process of transformation of the individual and society is based on elemental and dynamic bonds. It is a way of life not dependent on hierarchy, fame or personal gain. It requires austere restraint, utilization of time in accordance with the organization's objectives and thorough probity in one's personal life. It is only change that is brought about by the power of reasoning that is permanent. An individual's learning, wealth, prosperity and fame are of use only when he utilizes them in an unselfish manner for people's interests.

It is these criteria that created a huge gulf between the ways and outlook of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh. The triumvirate of Savarkar-Moonje-Paramanand wished to fix and define Hindu unity, Hindu harmony and the Hindu Rashtra solely in the realm of political appeal to the Hindus, analyses born of circumstances, external aggression and especially in the context of Islam. They believed that propaganda and education of the theology of Hindutva was sufficient to overcome the contradictions that existed in society. The Mahasabha was in direct competition with the Congress; a political competition whose ideological 'other' was the Muslim League. The Sangh, for its part, had no rivalry, either with the Congress or the Hindu Mahasabha. In fact, till 1945, neither did the League criticize the RSS nor did the Sangh make Islamic intransigence and separatism the fulcrum of its expansion.

It must be said to Dr Hedgewar's credit that he never made public the differences in outlook between the Sangh and the Mahasabha. He had no wish to put organizations working for the Hindu cause in the dock.

Hedgewar and Moonje

Among the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha, Dr Moonje enjoyed the closest relationship with Dr Hedgewar. A prime reason for this was Dr Moonje's affection for Hedgewar and his appreciation and support for the latter's patriotism, confidence and resolve. Hedgewar had also received ample support from Dr Moonje during the days of his participation in the phase of the country's armed struggle. Dr Moonje nurtured a lifelong affection for Dr Hedgewar; the latter too respected Moonje and remained grateful to him for his assistance and guidance in his early years.

Views on India's freedom movement and the nature, purposes, structure and programmes of a Hindu organization, however, were on an altogether different plane than the personal relationship between these two luminaries. We have tried to throw light on this particular aspect in various chapters of this book. For example, Dr Hedgewar's views on the Non-cooperation Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement were totally different from

those of Dr Moonje's. Similarly, both these eminent Hindu leaders differed vastly with regard to Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress.

Those who have studied the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh as well as the Hindu Mahasabha have accorded more than due importance to Dr Moonje's role in the founding of the Sangh. In the colonial era, whether knowingly or otherwise, the provincial government in the Central Provinces & Berar too considered Dr Moonje to be the founder and ideologue of the RSS. This misconception on the part of the government was cleared only in March 1934, during a lengthy debate on the Sangh in the Legislative Council. (This has been mentioned in the chapter "The Historic Debate".) But this misconception endured, or was deliberately kept alive by the Sangh's detractors.

Quite unfortunately, this particular debate of the Legislative Council has escaped the notice of those engaged in the study of the RSS. Neither has any serious attempt been made to learn the organizational and ideological relationship that existed between Dr Hedgewar and Dr Moonje. Faithfully adhering to the colonial tradition, Dr Moonje continued to be credited as the founder, ideologue, inspiration and driver of the Sangh. This happens to be one reason for the many myths about the Sangh that continue to hold sway.

Chetan Bhatt's book *Hindu Nationalism* (2001) mentions Dr Moonje as the founder of the RSS, while Pralay Kanungo's *The RSS and Politics* (2002) depicts Dr Hedgewar as reliant on Dr Moonje for both ideology and the organizational setup. An overseas researcher Casolari Maarzia, in her essay has Dr Hedgewar's association with Dr Moonje and tried to associate him with fascism and Mussolini. She has tried to propagate the theory that it was Dr Moonje who was the Sangh's real ideologue and held complete sway over its organizational setup. She further writes, "The first Hindu nationalist to come into contact with fascist organizations was Dr B.S. Moonje, a politician with intimate links to the Sangh. Dr Moonje was actually Dr Hedgewar's guru and both were close friends".[2]

2 Marzia Casolari; "Hindustan Foreign Tie-ups in the Thirties"; *Economic and Political Weekly,* February 22, 2000.

Dr Moonje travelled to London to attend the First Round Table Conference in January 1931. He halted at Italy on March 19, 1931 en route returning home, and met Italian ruler Benito Mussolini. This was purely a personal visit of Dr Moonje, at the most, one can surmise some supposed link of this visit to the Italian strongman to the Hindu Mahasabha. But linking the Sangh to Mussolini's ideology is pure flight of fancy, based on the fallacies surrounding the Sangh, which have been in vogue since the colonial period, among which Dr Moonje is believed to be the founder and ideologue of the RSS. It is therefore, necessary to throw light on the relationship between Dr Hedgewar and Dr Moonje at the ideological and organizational level.

It has already been mentioned despite the best efforts of Dr Moonje, Dr Hedgewar not only remained aloof from the voluntary organizations established by the Hindu Mahasabha, but also did not join them even symbolically. One can gauge his very limited participation even in the main body of the Hindu Mahasabha from his near-total absence from its programmes.

Dr Moonje had keen interest in military training and was always trying to get this initiative implemented. He also evaluated the *shakha* activities begun by Dr Hedgewar in the context of militarization of the Hindu society. Actually, the *shakha* did provide physical and weapons' training, but its main and long-term purpose was to impart mentaland ideological training to cadres. It was because of this misconception regarding military training that Dr Moonje made Dr Hedgewar a member of the administrative wing of the "Central Hindu Sainik Shiksha Parishad" without the latter's consent. The body had 15 members. The extent to which Moonje was overwhelmed by Dr Hedgewar's organizational capability can be gauged from his letter to Vishwanathrao Kelkar on March 20, 1935. Dr Moonje wrote: "I have included Shri Bobade and Dr Hedgewar in the Central Hindu Sainik Shiksha Parishad. I have neither consulted them in this regard nor have sought their prior consent. A fee of Rs 100 has to be paid in advance for gaining membership of this Parishad, but I shall waive off Dr Hedgewar's fees. I wish to keep him with me in the administrative wing under any circumstances".

However, Dr Hedgewar showed no enthusiasm for this. His total dedication and focus was towards the RSS and its expansion. He did take part in a couple of meetings of this Mahasabha body, but remained inactive, listed only in name.

Dr Moonje's place in the Sangh was the same as that of Bhai Paramanand, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Loknayak Aney, Jaykar, L.B. Bhopatkar and other Hindu Mahasabha leaders. All of these eminent leaders were invited as guest speakers to the Sangh's programmes. These guest nationalists, however, had no say in the determination of the Sangh's policies or programmes. Dr Hedgewar used to invite both the sympathizers as well as the detractors of the Sangh to its programmes. This was truly a unique example of independent exchange of views. That alone was the reason a person like Balaji Huddar, who had once been the *Sarkaryavah* (general secretary) of the RSS but later turned Marxist and became the Sangh's bitter critic, still used to be invited to the Sangh programmes. It is evident that Dr Hedgewar was not dependent on outsiders for formulating the Sangh's policies or charting out its programmes or movements.

There were significant ideological differences between Dr Moonje and Dr Hedgewar, but neither ever made these differences public. Hedgewar was not at all in agreement with Moonje's policy as regards British imperialism and the minority communities. Hindu Mahasabha delegations used to meet the Viceroy and other colonial administrative figures. The Mahasabha actually wished to acquire the same political heft in its dealing with the British rulers as the Congress and the Muslim League. Dr Moonje even travelled to London to represent the Hindu Mahasabha in the First and Second Round Table Conferences. The Sangh was the sole all-India organization that never sent any representation to the colonial regime, nor expressed any desire for dialogue. Even when the regime let loose a wave of political and judicial repression in 1934, the Sangh did not put forth any demand or submit any explanation. Dr Hedgewar wished to deal with imperialism in one language that of struggle, whether nonviolent or violent. Like a true yogi, he was engaged in preparing the RSS to be firmly rooted in nationalism against imperialism.

Thus, Dr Hedgewar was not unduly agitated over the Muslim problem like the Hindu Mahasabha was, nor was he perturbed by it. He fully recognized the reality that it was the internal weakness of the Hindu society that gave rise to challenges to its nationhood from time to time. The only solution to this lay in a strong, vibrant society and the incessant flow of nationalism. He therefore, considered any compromise with imperialism under the pretext of the Hindu-Muslim question as the antithesis of nationalism.

An incident in 1932 highlights the ideological differences of Dr Hedgewar and Dr Moonje. Dr Moonje accepted the British as a third force between Hindus and Muslims and wanted British rule to continue in Hindu interests. Speaking at a Hindu Mahasabha function on February 14, 1932, Moonje said:

> "Even if the British were ready to hand over power to Indians, who would they hand over the reins to Hindus or Muslims? If power were to be handed over to Muslims, what is the guarantee that they wouldn't turn it over to the Emirs of Afghanistan? If power is handed to Hindus, are they confident that they will prove capable of checking Islamic aggression? If not, what will Hindus gain from a mere transfer of power?" [3]

Dr Hedgewar found this speech to be counter to the spirit of nationalism. Moonje's apprehensions and his advocacy of the British as a third balancing force between Hindus and Muslims were totally against his nature. Hedgewar was not prepared to address the Hindu-Muslim issue through British mediation nor did he want them to be any 'third force'. Hedgewar reached Moonje's house early morning the very next day, to voice his protest against the latter's speech, accompanied by another Sangh leader Martand Jog. Moonje later wrote about this meeting: "Jog vociferously protested against my speech of yesterday. I failed to understand which part of my speech was objectionable by both. Jog's opposition made it clear to me that they thought I was using the

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3 *Moonje Papers;* Diary No. 4; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

Sangh's image for my own interests. This opened my eyes. Henceforth, I shall refuse to even speak at their meetings. I certainly do not wish that they should feel I am exploiting them". [4]

The differences between Dr Hedgewar and Dr Moonje over national interests and Hindu organization is clearly enunciated by this incident. Ignoring Muslim separatist politics for the time being, Dr Hedgewar was committed to channelizing Hindu energy against imperialism.

The question whether a Hindu organization should be political in its nature and purpose or otherwise, began to now assume serious proportions. It was no longer possible to ignore it. Dr Moonje regarded any Hindu organization as a natural rival of the Congress and an inextricable part of day-to-day politics, whereas Dr Hedgewar considered that the socio-cultural persona of any Hindu organization was a medium to infuse the spirit of nationalism and strengthen the society and nation. To him, the political aspect of his organization lay in cooperating with the Congress in an India still under alien rule, till such time as the Sangh itself did not attain the capability to organize a revolution against colonialism. Therein lay the major difference between the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS.

Dr Moonje had another trait of making public proclamations and statements. At times, he would issue statements to newspapers on behalf of the Sangh as though he were its official spokesperson. Quite unlike Moonje, Hedgewar kept away from the press. He never bothered to publicly disclaim or oppose any such statement issued on the Sangh's behalf, and ignoring them, preferred to keep the Sangh away from any controversy. Hedgewar's reticence in this respect too, gave rise to uncertainty about the Sangh's ties with Dr Moonje. When the provincial government of the Central Provinces & Berar made an analogous statement about Dr Moonje, the *Maharashtra* wrote in its editorial:

"From where did Home Minister Shri Raghavendra Rao acquire the information that Dr Moonje is the founder of the RSS?

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4 *Moonje Papers;* Diary No. 4; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

The truth is that Dr Moonje is nowhere related to the Sangh's founding, its constitution or organizational work. The reins of the Sangh have firmly been in the hands of one only individual right from the beginning, and that is Dr Hedgewar".[5] The government had to admit its error in the Legislative Council.

A question raised by Babasaheb Khaparde, a senior member of the Legislative Council of the Central Provinces still remains quite relevant. Khaparde queried, "Why are Dr Moonje's sins being visited upon the Sangh's head?" he further said, "I wish to state before the Council that Moonje has nothing to do with the organization of the RSS. It is possible that he may have associated himself with it".[6]

This opinion on the relationship between Moonje and the RSS was based on facts, which were brought to the fore by senior leaders of the Central Provinces and newspapers as well. Yet, this clarification continues to be ignored even today.

Symbolic Rebuttal

Dr Hedgewar quietly bore the aspersions, rancour, rivalry and sometimes even calumny on the part of the Hindu Mahasabha, but when the air was becoming truly poisoned, raising doubts in the minds of his *swayam sevaks,* he had to intervene to clarify matters. For the first time, he invited Mahasabha leaders to an RSS *shakha* at Wardha in 1938 and explained the Sangh's policies vis-à-vis the Mahasabha. Hedgewar said at this conclave:

> "The Sangh has undertaken the task of organizing Hindus, whereas the Hindu Mahasabha is a political organization. It is my conviction that when our country is under alien rule, patriots should certainly participate in politics. The Sangh is engaged in the task of arousing the spirit of patriotism in Hindus; therefore, it is not possible for *swayam sevaks* to take part in the programmes of the Hindu Mahasabha. If the Mahasabha wishes their participation,

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5 *Ibid*; Personal Diary
6 Winter Session of the Legislative Council of the Central Provinces, 1934

> the Sangh will not force its activists to shun the former. But it is also true that the Sangh does not issue directions to its activists to take part in the activities and initiatives of the Mahasabha."

Golwalkar too answered the lingering doubts raised by the Mahasabha about the Sangh's neutrality on October 22, 1939, in Dr Hedgewar's presence. This was the final message delivered to the Mahasabha. At the Dushera ceremony of the Sangh held at Nagpur, Golwalkar stated:

> "The Sangh has today completed fourteen years and is stepping into its fifteenth one. We are progressing towards youth. There are many tasks to do, but the Sangh has chosen one that of organizing Hindus. We have consciously eschewed all other activities that carry the label of 'politics' in the sense that we are not attached to any present political party / organization. We have to work according to our ideology, policies and programmes, without being confused with others". [7]

The Sangh's local functionaries now began strongly rebutting the Mahasabha's allegations against it. After the acrimony over the Bhaganagar Satyagraha, Hindu Mahasabha leaders from Maharashtra, among who Joglekar and Nathuram Godse were prominent, began castigating the Sangh as anti-Hindu and even discouraged *swayam sevaks* from attending *shakhas*. Godse wielded considerable influence in Poona. He considered the RSS to be an organization responsible for frittering away the energies of Hindu youngsters. Godse had played quite an active role in the Bhaganagar Satyagraha and had proceeded to Hyderabad, leading a group of activists against the Nizam. In a rebuttal of the anti-Sangh propaganda, launched by the Mahasabha, Bhaurao Deshmukh, a prominent Sangh leader said at Poona:

> "First of all, I wish to tell those malicious minds that the RSS is not a military force of the Hindus, nor a military

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7*Mahratta;* November 3, 1939.

wing of the Hindu Mahasabha. The Sangh's endeavour is to make Hindus nationalists in the true sense. There is a vast difference between the RSS and other organizations. Such a huge organization has certainly not been created to supply activists or numbers for others. Irrespective of the excellent military training provided in the Sangh, this is not its true form or content. Its real work is to intellectually shape the nation's mind so that the spirit of nationalism can flow". [8]

Dr Hedgewar's health had begun to decline rapidly from 1939 onwards. He was, of course, the fulcrum around which the Sangh revolved. He must have naturally been apprehensive that the hawkish gaze of Hindu politicians on *swayam sevaks* would prove to be an impediment in the organization's functioning. Hedgewar therefore, trained and prepared expert advocates for the Sangh's cause like Golwalkar, Ram Gosawi and Deshmukh, who were fully capable of countering any intellectual challenge thrown at the RSS. Dr Hedgewar thus saved the Sangh from being torched in the torridity of the Hindu Mahasabha's political ambitions. After conflict with the imperial regime and enduring its repressive wrath, the second and no less important test for the Sangh was the pole-vaulting political ambitions of its own ideological siblings. Kelkar has aptly summed up this: "To Dr Hedgewar goes the credit of keeping his organization from becoming an appendage of the Hindu Mahasabha even though he regarded Veer Savarkar highly". [9]

Opposition from the Congress

Opposition to the RSS was occasionally expressed by local Congress leaders and workers in the Central Provinces. There were two main reasons for opposition to the Sangh arising in the Congress. Firstly, according to Thengdi, Dr Hedgewar had appointed many Mahasabha leaders as *sanghchalaks*. This was during the early stages of the Sangh's development. These

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8 *Kaal;* April 8, 1940.
9 D.V. Kelkar; *Economic Weekly;* February 4, 1950; p133.

appointees would every now and then "issue irresponsible statements about the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi, with which the Sangh had nothing to do, but owing to their relationship with the RSS, there would often be misunderstandings". Since the relationship between the Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha was not formally demarcated, the Congress looked upon the Sangh as a paramilitary organization of the Hindu Mahasabha.

Secondly, it was not unnatural that the upheavals in the politics of the Central Provinces would cast their shadow upon the RSS too. Dr Moonje and Abhyankar were two bitter rivals for ascendancy in the politics of the province in the twenties. The competition between these two in the Hindu Mahasabha reached to the levels of political hustling and sometimes, character-assassination too. Moonje had serious reservations about Gandhi and his policies; moreover, he himself was no Gandhian. The Abhyankar - Pooran Chand Ranka faction was totally committed to Gandhi and Nehru. Dr Hedgewar was personally close to Dr Moonje and the latter was mistakenly assumed to be the founder of the Sangh. The Abhyankar faction therefore, believed that attacking the Sangh was akin to targeting Moonje. This was the reason for animosity against the RSS in the Congress. Abhyankar, Brijlal Biyani, Pooran Chand Ranka and others were ardent spokespersons of the anti-RSS brigade. Newspapers on which they wielded influence, included the *Matrubhoomi* published from Akola, would throw accusations at the RSS, which naturally influenced the rank and file of the Congress. Often, news would be fabricated in order to deliberately sow misunderstandings between the Congress and the Sangh. It was in reply to such a blatantly untrue piece of reporting that Dr Hedgewar wrote on August 11, 1938, "It has been reported that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has organized a meeting at Chanda in order to oppose the Congress. This is totally false; it doesn't have an iota of truth. All of you very well know that the Sangh doesn't involve itself in such petty things".

In fact, the RSS used to inspire its workers to participate in Congress movements or agitations too. Hundreds of *swayam sevaks* of the Central Provinces were active in the Congress

network too. But as relations between the two entities soured further in the decade of the thirties, the Congress unit of the Yavatmal district issued a notice with directions that anyone who was linked to the Sangh would not be permitted to be a member of the Congress Committee. This event pained Dr Hedgewar, and he wrote to Yavatmal district *sanghchalak* Annasaheb Jatkar on July 5, 1937, terming this incident as "an atrocity on the Sangh" by the Congressmen of Yavatmal. Hedgewar wrote, "If this news is true, you may arrange to immediately furnish me with detailed and accurate information regarding the same". The Congress' discriminatory attitude against Hindutva-oriented organizations came to the fore through an event at its Faizpur session. During the flag-raising ceremony at this session, the Congress tricolor was stuck midway on a mast eighty feet high. Many tried unsuccessfully to de-tangle the flag, after which a representative Kisan Singh Pardesi courageously climbed up the mast-pole and freed the fabric. Loud cheers rang out for him as the flag fluttered atop the mast. The Congress session also accepted a proposal to felicitate Pardesi. But no sooner had he revealed that he had mustered courage because of the nationalist spirit of the RSS, the Congressmen developed cold feet. How could they felicitate any *swayam sevak* of the Sangh?

Dr Hedgewar's joy knew no bounds when he heard about this contribution of a *swayam sevak*. He departed from the Sangh's tradition of eschewing publicity and called Kishan Singh Pardesi to the Devpur *shakha,* and publicly felicitated him. Presenting a small goblet of Chanda as a token to him, Dr Hedgewar said, "It is a *swayam sevak*'s natural duty to stake his very life if necessary, to remove any obstacle to the nation's work. This is our national dharma".

While on one hand Dr Hedgewar driven by the spirit of anti-imperialism demonstrated his affection towards the Congress, the latter harboured hatred for the Sangh. Dr. Kakasaheb Tembhe, a Congressman who sympathized with the Sangh, was perturbed by this. He wrote to Hedgewar, requesting the latter to criticize the Congress' style of functioning and ideological orientation. Tembhe believed that this would pacify the growing discontent among the Sangh's *swayam sevaks*.

Dr Hedgewar's reply to Tembhe reveals not only his own evaluation of the Congress organization, but also his philosophical side. Hedgewar did not wish to allow any disaffection towards the Congress in the minds of *swayam sevaks*. To him, there were only two options. The RSS would have to rapidly enhance its own strength as to be able to evict the British from India through a revolution; else, the anti-imperialist struggle would have to continue under the aegis of the Congress. Hedgewar did not wish to create multiple centres of the anti-imperialist struggle. It was this line of reasoning that prompted him to reply to Tembhe thus, "Each individual in this world behaves and talks according to his nature. It is not mandatory to regard him as representing any party or ideology. In my opinion, it is erroneous to praise or condemn any party or its ideology owing to the utterances of any member who is supposed to represent it. A true gentleman of lofty character belonging to any political party does not wish ill of any other party".

Compared to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Congress' Sewa Dal was leagues behind in terms of work. Vexed at this state of affairs, the Sewa Dal's founder-president Dr. N.S. Hardikar took an indirect swipe at the RSS at a conclave at Nagpur in August 1929. Not able to conceal his jealousy, he said: "We have heard of a youth movement in Nagpur. At a time when external forces are sucking our blood like parasites in one's body, claiming one's movement to be apolitical and social is akin to having no movement at all".

Just one year later, the Sangh jumped into the Congress movement (the Civil Disobedience Movement) and Hardikar had to eat his own words. He had to admit Dr Hedgewar's command in organization and wrote to him in December 1934, expressing his desire to study the Sangh's working and ideological orientation at close quarters. In his reply Dr Hedgewar wrote, "It is a matter of satisfaction for us that you wish personally to closely observe the Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh. There will be a Sangh camp in every district from December 22nd to 27th. You may kindly reach Nagpur by the Mail on the morning of the 22nd or the afternoon express. This way, you can observe three or four camps and obtain full knowledge about the Sangh and its working".

Despite this openness, equanimity and self-confidence on the part of Dr Hedgewar, many Congress leaders were filled with apprehension about him. What surprised Hedgewar was that even an individual of such eminence as Jamnalal Bajaj, carried away by the malicious propaganda against the Sangh, sent him a questionnaire wanting to know the Sangh's views on Khadi, the campaign for removal of untouchability, the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi. Dr Hedgewar wrote back to him saying, "Instead of replying through a letter about what the Sangh wishes, I shall be happy to meet you personally to answer your queries, if you permit me time to do so". Dr Hedgewar had worked along with Jamnalal Bajaj in the Wardha Swyamsevak Parishad, which was established in 1916. The RSS work in Wardha was as strong as it was in Nagpur, and the *sanghchalak* at Wardha was Appaji (Harekrishna) Joshi. Therefore, for Bajaj to remain ignorant of the Sangh and its workings was baffling to say the least.

Jamnalal Bajaj, accompanied by Ganpatrao Tikekar came to Nagpur on January 31, 1934 and met Dr Hedgewar. When the Doctor explained to him the Sangh's outlook and views on Khadi, untouchability and other issues, Jamnalal Bajaj left only after a lengthy meeting with him.

The Sangh continued to progress between the twin forces of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress. While the Mahasabha continued to vent its ire on the Sangh's supposed affection for the Congress, the Congress was anxious to keep it at a distance as it considered the Sangh to be an appendage of the Mahasabha. Amid all these contradictions, mockeries, insults and calumnies, Dr Hedgewar continued working to keep the Sangh firmly fixated on its objective, confident and unperturbed. This wealth of character also proved to the Sangh's protective armour.

Rise and Spread of RSS

The Civil Disobedience Movement had brought the anti-imperialist character of the Sangh to the fore. Till then, the government was under the impression that the Sangh was like other gymnasiums and had nothing to do with political issues. The government was always wary of Dr Hedgewar because of his association with the Sangh and its *swayam sevaks*, as well as the military training provided to the Sangh's members. Its participation in anti-imperialist agitations and movements now left the government in no illusion about the nature and character of the Sangh. The government now began determining its own policy towards the Sangh and implementing repressive measures.

Keeping an Eye on Sangh

The police and administration began keeping a close eye on the Sangh from 1929 onwards. The regime began suspecting the Sangh's motives. The Intelligence Bureau report of 1929 mentioned, "The only thing worth paying attention in Wardha is the establishment of the RSS, which appears to be the branch of the same body established at Nagpur. The chief speakers were Dr Moonje, Cholkar and Paranjpe. The speakers had said that its immediate goal was to organize Hindus for their safety, but its ultimate goal was to attain Swaraj (freedom)".

The provincial government of Bombay too sought information about the Sangh from its counterpart in the Central Provinces. In 1931, the government at the centre made enquiries about the RSS for the first time, regarding the military-like training being provided to its swayamsevaks. The government deputed an official from its information department who toured Nagpur and other parts of the Central Provinces and talked to some 'confidants' about the Sangh's activities. The report of this particular official

stated that the "Sangh has the capability of emerging as a terrorist organization". The government's military department now voiced its concern at this.

Finally, in 1932, the colonial regime expressed its opinion on this matter. "The only worrisome aspect in Nagpur is the presence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Its leaders have unmistakably been involved in anti-government agitations. It is therefore necessary to keep a careful watch on this movement".[1] Preparing well-trained and disciplined youth by any organization, for involvement in movements against the regime was an undoubted challenge. True to its nature, the government was now readying itself to suppress the Sangh movement.

Government Ban

The government of the Central Provinces issued a notice in December 1932 banning its employees from joining the RSS, directly or indirectly. The circular's order read: "Directions regarding the participation of government employees have been specified in Rule 23 of the Government Employees Code of Conduct. According to these rules, government employees must stay away from all such activities. It is the government's firm and considered opinion that the organization by the name of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is clearly communal in its nature. Owing to its increasing involvement in political activities, any ties to the organization on the part of government employees will be inconsistent with the unbiased discharge of their duties. The government therefore, has decided that no government employee shall be allowed to become a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or participate in its programmes".[2]

The government had banned its employees from associating with the Sangh under a clear-cut plan. It was Dr Hedgewar's participation that infused life in the dying Civil Disobedience Movement in the Central Provinces. To stop the participation of the

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1 *Report on the Political Situation in the Central Provinces & Berar;* July (second half) 1932; 1/12/40; Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
2 File 88/33, Home (Political), National Archives of India, New Delhi

Sangh in the second leg of this movement the individual Civil Disobedience Movement the government in 1932 let loose a reign of repression. Dr Hedgewar had apprehensions about such a move by the government and would acquire information about the deliberations going on in the government about the RSS, from time to time. He was careful to present the Sangh as a peaceful organization, detached from politics, in his public speeches, but the government considered this to be carefully thought out ploy of his. Prior to the ban on government employees joining the Sangh, announced in 1932, Dr Hedgewar said in one of his speeches:

> "The 1932 agitation is the second phase of the 1930 movement. The government's fears about the Sangh assisting this movement are understandable. It has therefore decided to declare organizations like ours as illegal. The Sangh is a powerful organization in Nagpur and reliable information about the government's intentions to ban it has begun reaching us. Eminent members of the Council have told me that this information has reached them from the innermost sources of the government. However, I have full faith that the government of the Central Provinces shall not commit this blunder. The Sangh teaches its followers to maintain peace and discipline at all times. Why should the government want to ban it? I have always been saying that the government cannot ban the Sangh, as it would amount to striking at one's own feet. The day the government bans the RSS declaring it to be illegal; there will be two hundred *shakhas* in Nagpur. There will be as many *shakhas* of the Sangh all over, as the number of *swayam sevaks* today."

The self-confidence of *swayam sevaks* had greatly increased as a result of the success of their work and Dr Hedgewar's bold challenge. About 1,200 *swayam sevaks* in full Sangh uniform conducted a march-past on Vijayadashami Day in October 1932. Government employees too, in considerable numbers were associated with the Sangh. The government's circular was thus intended to keep this particular class away from the Sangh and curb its activities. The December 1932 fortnightly report of the

Intelligence Department clearly mentioned, "The participation of government employees in the Hindu organization called Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is banned on account of its involvement in political agitations".

This particular action of the government evoked limited reactions. Neither the RSS nor its well-wishers took it seriously. Questions however, were raised in the Legislative Council of the Central Provinces on this particular action of the government. M.P. Kolte demanded the withdrawal of this notice and posed the following questions:

a) Is it not true that the Sangh does not participate in politics, and is engaged in religious and social activities?

b) If this is true, will you kindly withdraw the ban on government employees' participation in the Sangh?

In its reply, the government stated, "It is not in our knowledge that the Sangh does not take part in political activities". [3]

The government drew a wide arc as far as interpreting the ban on government employees' participation in the Sangh was concerned. It announced that not only its employees, but even their relations and children would not be able to take part in RSS activities. When Dr Moonje approached the then Home Minister Raghavendra Rao, he simply passed the buck to Chief Secretary Gordon, instead of taking responsibility for the move. When Moonje took up the matter with Gordon, the latter's counter-question was, "How can you allow government employees to become RSS members?" When Moonje wanted to know why the family members of government employees were being prevented from participating in the Sangh, Gordon tried to skirt the issue saying, "Our order pertains only to the government employees. There is no mention of others in it. I have no information about their offspring or relatives being prevented". [4]

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3 *Hitvada;* January 26, 1933.
4 *Moonje Papers;* Diary No. 5, March 14, 1933

All the newspapers of the province condemned this order of the government. The sole exception remained the *Hitvada*. The *Kesari* termed this order as devoid of reason and repressive. [5] The Sangh, however, remained unaffected by this ban, a fact that can be gauged from Dr. Hedgewar's letter to a senior *swayam sewak*:

> "It is because of workers like you that the Sangh's work is continuously progressing even in such adverse circumstances. The government's circular mentions the Sangh as being political and communal in nature, but our organization is not communal. This order of the government has not affected the Sangh at Nagpur adversely, nor shall it do so in future". [6]

RSS on the March

The RSS picked up momentum after this ban order by the government. Dr. Hedgewar was firmly focused on his objectives and was not in the least perturbed by this order. Owing to his social and personal relations, many well-known social and political figures of the province attended the Sangh's camps to express their solidarity and support for it. Among them were Govindrao Pradhan, S.B. Tambe, N.C. Kelkar and M.S. Aney. The RSS had now begun to rapidly expand outside Nagpur and Wardha and reach other places in the province. Shakhas had opened at towns like Gondia, Sindi, Talegaon and many other smaller locations. Wardha hosted an RSS camp from September 26th to 28th. On the 28th, a gathering of more than 5,000 was there to listen to Dr. Hedgewar. The RSS had organized training camps at Gondia, Phulgaon, Alipur, Arvi, Nachangaon, Sindi, Talegaon and other places too, this was sufficient to convey to the government that not only was the Sangh unaffected by its order, but also unshaken. The number of Sanghshakhas in 1929 was 37, which grew to 125 by 1933. Dr Hedgewar had made this announcement on September 28, 1933 at Nagpur, at a Sangh programme. The number of RSS

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5 *Kesari,* December 30, 1932.
6 Hedgewar's letter to Gopalrao Chitale dated January 3, 1933.

swayam sevaks had swelled to 12,000. Nagpur alone was home to twelve large *shakhas* and 2,000 *swayam sevaks*; Wardha had 23 *shakhas* and 300 *swayam sevaks*. [7] The RSS was now no longer an organization confined only to the Central Provinces, but had spread to the United Provinces, Bihar and Ajmer-Marwar as well.

About a thousand *swyam sevaks* conducted a march-past at Nagpur on Vijayadashami Day in 1933. The Bhonsale Raja, Babarao (Ganesh Damodar) Savarkar and Dr Moonje too were present at this rally. Babarao Savarkar had joined the Sangh in 1931 and now merged his "Tarun Hindu Sabha" (Young Hindu Association) with the RSS. This erstwhile organization had many branches in the Central Provinces.

The growth and expansion of the RSS was now proving a real headache for the government. Secretary to the Government of India M.G. Hollatt issued an order on January 27, 1933 to collect detailed information about the RSS. On January 23, Hollatt expressed dissatisfaction with the measures taken so far by the provincial government of the Central Provinces to check the growth of the RSS. He queried, "How on earth can the provincial government permit setting up of such a paramilitary organization?" In its evaluation of Dr Hedgewar, the British government said, "Dr Hedgewar has phenomenal capability as an organizer and his voluntary organization is disciplined and effective". The imperial government went so far as to term Hedgewar "the Hitler of the RSS". [8]

The most telling evidence of the government's extremely biased policy and its baleful eye on the RSS was its policies towards other voluntary organizations in the Central Provinces. Prominent among the list of organizations on the government's watch were the Hanuman Vyaayaamshaala, Hanuman Vyaayaam Prasarak Mandal and the Pratap Vyaayaamshaala. These bodies too, used to impart military training to their members along the lines of the RSS. A report of the Intelligence Department in April 1933 said that the

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7 *Kesari;* October 10, 1933.
8 File No.88/33; Appendix, p3-4.

Hanuman Vyaayaam Mandal had 150 branches in the Central Provinces, United Provinces, Karnataka and Punjab. Many of its programmes had received government assistance and government officials too had been present at its camps to witness the military training being imparted there.

In fact, the government effusively praised these organizations for their "good work". One of their trainers, Laxman Kokardekar had also visited Germany to receive further training. The government seemed to have no objection to its links with Nazi Germany, but the RSS, which had no link with the overseas world, was a target of the colonial regime's ire. The Sangh had never drawn inspiration from any external organization, nor had it ever attempted to mould itself according to them. Dr. Hedgewar's views on this were clear: "It would not be proper to compare the agitations in other countries with those in India. We are under alien rule whereas those nations are free. And what is the purpose of looking to foreign countries? If we cast a glance at our own history, we are certain to find many inspirational episodes. We must cultivate the tendency of being firmly rooted in our own history".

Takeover of the Sangh's Premises

The *shakha* of the RSS at Nagpur used to be held at Mohitewada. When Dr Hedgewar was imprisoned for his participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement, the government admitted a complaint on behalf of the offspring of the deceased Sardar Mohite, owner of Mohitewada, and moved in to evict the RSS from its *shakha* ground. Even this complaint had been cooked up at the government's behest and pressure. Following this, Raja Laxmanrao Bhonsale provided space at his Hattikhana for the RSS to hold its *shakha*. But following his death, objection on behalf of his still minor son was raised and an order to shut down this *shakha* too was passed on July 19, 1933. Instead of entangling itself in litigation, the Sangh chose to completely ignore these happenings. Terming this an "extraordinary crisis" after the Sangh's founder Dr. Hedgewar wrote, "If the government believes that these things will prevent the Sangh's functioning, it is deluding itself". The RSS completely disregarded the government's ban on

its *shakha* at Mohitewada and continued its utilization of the place as before.

Second Blow

The colonial administration now decided to use harsher repressive measures against the RSS. The Local Self-Administrative Department of the government of the Central Provinces issued a fresh circular on December 20, 1933 against the Sangh, which read:

> "It has come to the notice of the government that some teachers of the District Councils have become members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Government employees have been banned from becoming its members or participating in its programmes because of its communal nature. It is the opinion of the Central Provinces (Local Self-Administration Ministry) that it is undesirable for even the employees of local administrative bodies to maintain any links with this organization. They represent organizations that have the right to levy taxation upon all sections of the society. In such circumstances, it would be highly improper for these local bodies to permit their employees to be a part of any communal organization. It is my request that you convey this point of view to all local bodies under your department and direct them to issue orders to this effect to their employees".

This circular was dispatched to all administrative divisions in the province with orders for their strict implementation, with various local administrative bodies taking action accordingly. For instance, the Alipur unit of the Sangh was not allowed to celebrate its annual Dushera ceremony at the school in Wardha. The *Hitvada* wrote, "The president and vice-president of the District Council had vowed not to let the Sangh hold its ceremony in the school's premises. They complained to the police superintendent and even sought police help to prevent the RSS". [9] But Dr. Hedgewar neither bowed to this reign of repression from the government, nor did his self-confidence waver even a bit. On the contrary, the RSS only

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9 *Hitvada;* October 8, 1933, p 5.

intensified its activities and popular political leaders, social workers and litterateurs of the province began to be invited to the Sangh's camps. Kakasaheb Khadilkar, President of the Akhil Maharashtra Sahitya Sammelan attended one of the Sangh's camps along with other representatives of this literary body. Khadilkar said, "We litterateurs are brave with words, but the RSS actually worships divine power. It is itself strength personified. What we may not be able to achieve even after delivering thousands of speeches or articles has been made possible by the Sangh's sheer work. It is only through the visual form that one can glimpse the magnitude and potency of great concepts and ideas, and the Sangh is the most effective example of this". [10] Political leaders like Bhausaheb Kalikar, Madhavrao Chitnavis, T.G. Kedar, M.S. Aney, Haribhau Moonje, Sardar Yashwantrao Gujjar and Balwantrao Deshmukh too, participated in the ceremonies of the RSS and condemned the government's circular.

There was a fundamental difference in both these circulars. The 1932 circular was issued on the grounds of the organization being 'communal' and 'involved in political activities', whereas the 1933 circular was slapped solely on the grounds of being a 'communal organization'.

Ordeal by Fire

Dr. Hedgewar felt that the government, in its endeavour to test the patience, strength and popularity of the RSS was now pushing its repressive regime even further. He had completely ignored the first circular issued, but this time around, he firmly resolved to demonstrate the Sangh's strength to the regime.

The session of the Legislative Council concluded in January 1934. Hedgewar was busy with meetings. He issued directions to Sangh functionaries through letters. He wrote to Umakant Apte, a Sangh leader: "There is no need to fear this circular. Resolutions opposing it must be passed in the district councils and municipalities and these proposals must be then sent to the

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10 *Gyanprakash;* December 29, 1933; p 4.

government". Regarding the accusations levelled by the government against the RSS, another letter of his said, "The condition of the Sangh's opponents is such that they cannot fault us on anything, but cannot stomach our growing presence and work. The Sangh has never been communal on any occasion. It has never propagated disrespect of any caste or community. Therefore, the RSS cannot be termed as communal. Keeping this background in view this new circular is both unnecessary and unjust". [11]

Dr. Hedgewar's plan to combat this new ban soon began to be implemented. The local bodies of the province sent their resolutions to the government opposing its administrative fiat against the RSS. The Akola District Council condemned the government's move to label the Sangh as 'communal' and its own resolution praised Dr. Hedgewar for "rising above caste divisions and organizing the youth".

The Nagpur Municipal Corporation passed a resolution in support of the Sangh on March 10, 1933. Dr. Hedgewar's efforts to prevent rioting and restoring peace in Nagpur were acclaimed in this resolution. The municipal corporation of Sawner in its resolution of March 21 said, "The Municipal Committee believes that the organization by the name of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is not communal and neither are its activities objectionable. The Committee also holds that the participation of the Municipality's employees has in no way caused any hindrance in the discharge of their duties, nor is there any likelihood of this happening in the future. This organization is highly useful for providing physical and moral training to the youth. Therefore, this Committee expresses its opposition to the government circular and requests that the same be withdrawn". [12]

The municipal corporations of Wardha, Bhandara, Katol and Umred passed similar resolutions. The Wardha District Council accepted that the RSS was not a communal organization, but the majority of the Council's members were sympathizers of the government. Under pressure from the government, the Wardha

11 *Hitvada,* March 25, 1934.
12 *Hitvada,* March 25, 1934.

District Council too issued an order on August 7, 1933, banning its members from participating in RSS activities. The Sangh's 'revolutionary activities' were stated as the reason for this ban. The RSS had more than 3,000 *swyam sevaks* in Wardha alone, among which employees of local bodies and teachers were a large number. After the Vijayadashami of 1933, a large number of teachers affiliated to the Wardha District Council, and its employees were suspended from service for their participation in RSS programmes and activities. [13]

Thus, while the RSS grew rapidly after the Civil Disobedience Movement, the government too was making all efforts to curb its progress. The period between 1932 and 1934 was one of direct confrontation between the imperial government and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. In these two years, the Sangh under Dr. Hedgewar's inspirational leadership stood like a rock, braving imperial repression. It not only mobilized public opinion against the government's circular of the ban order on its employees, but also defeated it in the province's Legislative Council. This was the most eloquent testimony of the acceptability of the RSS in the Central Provinces, as well as the popularity of Dr. Hedgewar.

13 *Hitvada,* November 26, 1933.

Historic Legislative Debate on RSS

When the government of the Central Provinces issued its circular in December 1933 prohibiting employees of local administrative bodies and teachers from participating in the activities of the RSS, it did not in the least anticipate that it would have to face rough weather in the very next (budget) session of the Legislative Council. The reason for this hubris was its earlier experience. Its previous circular issued in 1932 preventing government employees from taking part in Sangh activities had failed to cause even a ripple in the political life of the province. After the issue of the second circular by district councils and municipalities, various resolutions were passed in the Sangh, but the government failed to take them seriously. Raghvendra Rao, the province's home minister who was also a staunch loyalist, was confident of his own abilities of political one-upmanship. He had helped the government weather storms on earlier occasions too. The office of the home minister was in fact, bestowed upon him as reward for this particular ability of his.

Dr. Hedgewar undertook a massive public outreach programme two months before the budget session of the Legislative Council. The RSS was not an unknown organization for the political leaders of the Central Provinces. They knew the Sangh well enough. However, this was the first instance of knowing about and listening to these happenings, concerning the RSS directly from its founder himself. Dr. Hedgewar demolished both the government's cocky self-confidence as well as Rahavendra Rao's conceit regarding his ability to outmanoeuvre political adversaries.

The budget session of 1934 was an extraordinary one. The government faced unexpected opposition in the Council. Politics in the Central Provinces was renowned for its factionalism. Indeed, it used to be said that there were more factions than leaders in the

province. Political organizations were split along the lines of Brahmin, non-Brahmin, Marathi-speaking, Hindi-speaking, Tilakite, Gandhian and Muslim. Yet, they transcended their mutual differences to demonstrate unprecedented unity on the RSS issue. The representatives of each faction and category showed their solidarity with the Sangh and vociferously opposed the government's circular. The government was taken aback at this coordination between the university, industrial workers, Muslims, women, backward classes, Brahmins, non-Brahmins and all major groups. Raghavendra Rao, who represented imperial forces and interests, was now forced to contend with the towering personality of Dr. Hedgewar inside the Legislative Council. Opposition to the government's machinations was so sharp, factual and logical that the government was not only forced to admit defeat, but was also shamed and humiliated. During the debate and question hour, members forced it into silence and also utterly exposed the intellectual poverty of the regime's loyalists.

The nationalist character of any organization is its salient feature. The spotless moral character of its founder and his total dedication to the nation enhances the strength, influence and popularity far beyond the limitations of its membership. Dr. Hedgewar's life was a living example of this.

Perhaps for the first and last time in the parliamentary history of colonial India, a debate raged for three whole days on the founding, founder, form, ideology and membership of any single organization. The debate in the Provincial Legislative Council on March 3, 7 and 8 of its 1934 budget session is an important historic document depicting the Sangh's committed stance against imperialism. Regrettably, in the post-independence debate on the Sangh's role in the freedom movement, this epochal event has remained unmentioned.

Question Hour

As mentioned earlier, the colonial regime through its circular had accused the RSS of being a communal body. At the onset of the budget session on March 3rd, during its question hour, members of the Provincial Legislative Council raised this issue. They wanted to

know from the government the definition of 'communal'; the government kept stalling the matter. When members demanded to know on what grounds was the RSS categorized as communal, Raghavendra Rao's reply was, "The speeches of the leaders of the RSS gives the impression that they have imbibed Germany's Nazism, i.e., Hitlerism as their goal and methodology". Rao began squirming when members demanded that this particular reply be quoted in the minutes of the Council's proceedings. The Chairman of the House had to intervene to state that the debate on this matter could continue any time afterwards. The House also sidestepped the question "Is any Muslim organization identified as communal by the government?" Rao tried to concentrate his attack on the RSS under the pretext of 'Nazism'.

The Legislative Council's debate hour conveyed to the government that its evaluation of the popularity of the RSS and Dr. Hedgewar was totally wrong. It couldn't imagine what lay in store ahead.

Cut Motion

As soon as the debate began on March 7, V.D. Kolte, a member presented a cut motion of one rupee under 'Demand No.8', under which the circular had been issued against the RSS. Presenting his cut motion, Kolte said,

> "I am presenting a cut motion under Demand No. 8 so that there may be a discussion in the Council about the government's circular issued in 1932, prohibiting government employees from participation in the RSS. According to the reasons the government has put forth for the issuance of such a circular, the activities of the RSS are 'communal', which is why government employees should not take part in its activities. During the question hour, we had wished to learn the meaning of the term 'communal' from the honorable home minister, but unfortunately could not be educated as to its meaning or definition. If we are to go by the meaning of this term, it appears that the government has a different meaning for this term, and is shying away from sharing its definition with us. If the

> government adheres to the definition of the term communal as described in the dictionary, I see no reason why any employee of the government should be prevented from being part of a movement which in no way prevents the discharge of his responsibilities. Presently, the word 'communal' is being defined as 'working for the interests of one particular community or spreading malice against another community'. If we were to accept this definition of the term 'communal', we ought to see whether the RSS, against which this circular has been issued, falls within the ambit of that definition. A scrutiny of the Sangh's activities reveals that it has three goals first, improving the condition of Hindu society; second, imparting physical training to Hindu youth and third, inculcate a spirit of discipline among Hindus. Considering these three aspects, it is apparent that there exists no ground to prevent the employees of local and provincial bodies from taking part in the activities of the RSS".
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> "Just as Hindus have their voluntary organization, the Muslims and Dalits have theirs as well. If government employees are not prevented from involvement in those organizations, I fail to understand why the government seeks to prevent its employees from participating only in the RSS?"

Kolte further alleged that the government was not only discriminating between various voluntary organizations, but also wished to make its employees total slaves of the government.

It now fell upon the government to continue the debate by marshalling arguments in support of its circular. Chief Secretary Rowton in his opposition to Kolte's cut motion quoted Rule 21 of the Government Employees Code of Conduct and sought to clarify that government employees ought to be impartial in the discharge of their duties and should not be part of any political movement. He further said, "This condition also applies to organizations that are communal in nature". Rowton then proceeded to narrate an entirely fictitious history of the RSS, concocted by the government itself. "I have to reveal the background of those who have founded the RSS.

It was Dr Moonje who had founded the Sangh in 1918, at a time of communal tension. The purpose of the RSS is to protect communal interests. Its purpose was certainly communal at the time of its founding. Very recently, at a rally in Dr Hedgewar's presence, they have openly announced 'Hindustan is for the Hindus alone; Hindus shall control any future government in India and it is up to them whether to allow any political rights or privileges to non-Hindus or not'. Presently, there is much discussion about the rights of different communities. It therefore behoves of government employees to maintain complete neutrality in such circumstances".

Defining the term 'communal' Rowton further said: "My friend from Bhandara has thrown much light on the government's inability to define the term 'communal'. The government is using the definition he has supplied. By communal, we mean those organizations that spread malice amongst other communities. Those organizations that work for the betterment of any particular community do not fall under the ambit of this definition, like the Anjuman and other educational institutions".

Rowton's address to the Council boosted the home minister's confidence and he stated, "The circular is based on the acitivities of the RSS". When members wished to know whether any minority community had complained against the Sangh, Rao drew their attention to the apprehensions of Bhandara's minority community regarding the RSS. But Raghavendra Rao's 'minorityism' fell flat when M.S. Rahman, a popular Muslim Council leader who represented the Berar municipal urban Muslim zone, rose to speak. Rahman sought to know from the home minister whether any Muslim organization had petitioned the government against the RSS asking for a ban on it. The government's reply was in the negative. Praising the Sangh's nationalist and positive Hindutva, Rahman said:

"I feel that while speaking on such issues is beneficial, silence on them is even more so. I would not have spoken on it, but am doing so at the insistence of some members. There are associations of Anglo-Indians, Muslims, Hindus and business communities. Can we term any of these communal? This way, the

Anglo-Indian Parishad can be called communal. So too can the All India Muslim Conference, Marwari Sudhar League and other similar bodies, as they represent particular sections of the society. I don't believe that any reasonable individual would object to a Muslim organization whose objective is the enhancement of the community's interests. Similarly, no honest Muslim would find fault with a Hindu organization that is not malicious and aggressive. I support this cut motion".

After this disposition, T.H. Kedar put the government in the dock by his aggressive stand. He asked of the government, "From the time of the founding of the RSS from 1918, we are told could the government not find a single instance till the year 1932 to declare it communal?" Kedar alleged that the government was acting on the basis of false reporting by the police. He challenged the government to place any literature of the RSS, which might be construed as communal, before the house. Targeting the imperial ways and means of working, Kedar further said, "The government has not adhered to even the ordinary principles of justice. It has not allowed the founders of the RSS to present their case. Is it proper to sit in the Secretariat and pass judgement on the Sangh?"

R.W. Phule, representing the urban industrial workers threw light on the objectives of the RSS and specified in his address to the house that he had personally interacted with people of the Sangh and it had at no time denied entry to the people of any other community. Its ideology of "Hindustan is for Hindus" had a very broad connotation, which actually meant "India is for Indians". He further queried, "Does the government have any instance where any Muslim or Christian wishing to join the Sangh was prevented from doing so?"

It was then the turn of a lady non-government (nominated) member Ramabai Tambe to speak in support of the RSS. She said, "I wish to protect Hindu youth from the repressive policies of the government by supporting this cut motion. The RSS is a highly useful body. It has begun from the Central Provinces but will soon spread throughout India, working to organize all communities. Is there any harm in organizing people? If you reply in the affirmative, I say that the government does not wish to see us organized and cohesive".

The government's intent became even clearer when it failed to place any objectionable fact about the RSS till 1932, i.e., the year of issuing its circular, in the house. Finally, in order to justify the grounds for its circular, the government quoted the speeches delivered on the occasion of the Makar Sankranti ceremony of the RSS in 1933. These were speeches delivered by two invitees to the Sangh ceremony Dr Moonje and Moropant Joshi, which were termed communal by the government. Rowton quoted excerpts from Joshi's speech, which read "There is no point in trying to conceal the fact that the RSS is a communitarian organization, neither is there any shame in admitting so. The moot point is whether it harbours any aggressive intent towards any community. This organization is actually committed to ending the ills of its community without harming any other in any way". Dr Moonje too supported Joshi's stand in his own speech.

Ramabai Tambe now wanted to know whether Joshi was the organizer of this ceremony or merely its presiding guest. The government had to then admit that he was merely the presiding guest of the function. The Council members ridiculed the government for targeting the RSS on the basis of speeches made by invitees to its event, and that too, going by the police report, which itself was highly dubious. The government was truly left red-faced when Council members jokingly asked whether the government had prepared its circular of 1932 after obtaining a prediction of what the RSS speech of 1933 was going to be!

Kolte once again cornered the government on some very fundamental issues. He was supported by B.G. Khaparde, R.A. Kanitkar, C.B. Parekh, U.N. Thakur, Thakur Manmohan Singh, M.D. Mangalmurti, S.G. Sapkal and W.Y. Deshmukh in their respective speeches in the house. Kolte said, "It has been stated that the RSS was formed in 1918, which is totally untrue. It has then been said that its founder is Dr Moonje. As far as I know, Dr Moonje is neither its founder nor the source of inspiration behind it. I do not believe that someone who empathizes with the RSS or cooperates with it also becomes its founder."

Regarding the allegation Dr Hedgewar being a supporter of Hitler, Khaparde said, "Dr Hedgewar has been accused of acting

like Hitler and propagating those principles which Hitler espouses. After going into his said speech in which Hedgewar is alleged to have referred to Hitler, I found that Dr Hedgewar has not mentioned Hitler even once in any of his speeches. I wish to reassure the house also for the fact that Dr Hedgewar has himself told me so. I have been told that it is for the first time that Dr Hedgewar has established a voluntary organization like this, and is therefore, as dangerous as Hitler. We may test this on the criterion of logic and I haven't forgotten my logic. Let us suppose an individual says to another that the latter's father sports a heavy moustache and is therefore... (laughter in the house). Similarly, if one says that Dr Hedgewar has a voluntary organization and so does Hitler; therefore, Dr Hedgewar is a Hitler. This is a totally ridiculous argument. If Dr Hedgewar has a voluntary organization, so do supporters of the Khilafat movement. Why doesn't anybody compare the Khilafat supporters to Hitler? This line of argument is nothing but defamation".

The communal intent of the government behind the issuance of this anti-Sangh circular was fully exposed during the course of the debate. U.N. Thakur revealed in his speech to the house that the member of the government who had extended the 1932 circular to cover the employees of local bodies too in 1933 Sharif was himself associated with a rabidly communal outfit called the *Tanzeem*.

Dr M.D. Mangalmurti representing the Nagpur University asked the government: "When the government's intelligence department closely watches the RSS day and night, why has the government itself remained silent for fourteen years? Why has the RSS been suddenly declared communal in 1932?" Mangalmurti confidently stated that there was no trace at all of communalism in the constitution, organization and goals of the RSS. Quoting the instance of the Nagpur riots of 1927, he stated that the *swayam sewaks* of the RSS had behaved in an entirely different manner than what the government was accusing them of. They had sincerely tried to prevent the outbreak of riots. Mangalmurti then attacked the government's intentions, saying, "The government doesn't appear to be fully satisfied with its own actions. Listening to the speeches of those arguing on behalf of the government, one gets the

feeling that it has some other intent in mind. It appears that the government's stated purpose of coming out with this circular is quite different from its actual one".

Altogether fourteen non-government members participated in this debate, with not a single one of them supporting the government. Apart from the duo of Rao and Rowton, the government could not find any other member to speak in its support.

According to the rules of the house, voting had to take place on the cut motion introduced. All that remained was the formality of defeat. The government however, had the option of accepting members' demand without the voting; ultimately, this was what happened. Both circulars were withdrawn. This was a major triumph of the RSS. The imperial ploy of isolating the Sangh on the grounds of communalism had failed miserably. Dr Hedgewar was present in the House in the visitors' gallery during both days of the debate. The RSS obtained the wide-ranging support of newspapers too.

The matter did not end there, though. Sharif faced three no-confidence motions in the House. The first one was moved by K.C. Pande, the second by Khaparde and the third was put forth by K.S. Naidu. Pande's proposal received the support of 30 members, while the other two members could draw the support of 29 members for their respective no-confidence motions against Sharif, whereas the needed number of votes was 22. Thus, all the three resolutions were included in the minutes of the proceedings. Debate on them took place on March 9. Ramabai Tambe conveyed to Sharif that if he would make a statement on the circular issued against the RSS to her satisfaction, she would vote without prejudice. Sharif, who hadn't opened his mouth even once during the debate, now intervened in order to save his own chair in the Council and hastened to clarify that this circular was advisory in nature, which applied to all organizations including the Sangh. In the division of votes, the no-confidence motion against Sharif garnered 34 votes for and against it. The chairman of the house then exercised his vote to save the government. [1]

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1 *The Indian Annual Registry,* Vol-1; January-June 1934, p 240.

The RSS celebrated Guru Poornima on March 18, 1934 as Vijay Diwas (day of victory). At a rally in Nagpur on that very day, Dr Hedgewar expressed his views on this entire episode. He said: "Everyone knows that the cycle of repression by the government of the Central Provinces is in motion these days. I was present in the Council during the debate. During this debate, Home Minister Rao alleged that the RSS is a supporter of Hitler and Nazism. But neither were able to prove that I or any of my successor workers had ever said anything in relation to Hitler or Nazism. I reckoned that the government might have obtained false witnesses to prove its allegations. During the question hour too, I thought the government might make use of false witnesses to prove that I was a supporter of Nazism. But the government failed to garner any such witness and the RSS has emerged unscathed from this trial".

Dr Hedgewar then discussed his speech which the government had twisted, as a supposed proof of his support for Nazism. He said: "Mr. Rao picked up a line from one of my speeches which said "Hindustan is a country of Hindus" and termed it "objectionable" and of "Hitlerian mentality". Hindustan will always remain a country of Hindus just as Britain is a country of the British, France of the French, Germany of Germans and Afghanistan of the Afghans. Similarly, Hindustan is of the Hindus. The Sangh is not a secret body. All its activities are conducted under the open skies. But the government's policy has been to pronounce someone guilty and then hang him. And it is in pursuance of this very policy that it declared the RSS to be a 'communal' and 'objectionable' organization. The real intent of the government was to crush the Sangh. In reply to Kolte's cut motion, the government quoted the 1933 speeches of Moropant Joshi and Dr Moonje as the basis of its action taken in 1932. It appears as though the government knew a year earlier that Joshi and Moonje would deliver such a speech. The government's records show the year of the founding of the RSS to be 1918 instead of 1925. The government claims that there was communal conflict in Nagpur that year, whereas in reality, neither had the RSS come into existence that year nor was there any communal clash between

Hindus and Muslims. All this reveals the mental bankruptcy of the government". [2]

Many senior personalities of Nagpur and the Central Provinces were present at this meet, prominent among them were S.B. Tambe, Ramabai Tambe, T.H. Kedar, N.B. Khare, M.S. Aney and Vishwanatahrao Kelkar. Aney heaped ridicule on the government saying, "It looks as though the government is an expert in predicting things".

Dr Hedgewar issued a letter on March 16, 1934 about the impact this event had in Nagpur, saying, "The last 15 days have been tumultuous ones. People everywhere have been talking about the Sangh. Except for government officials, everyone else including nominated Muslim, Parsi, non-Brahmin and other members voted in favour of the cut motion related to the RSS. Not only that, Muslim and Parsi members also praised the Sangh. The Sangh has thus achieved an unprecedented victory in the Legislative Council of the Central Provinces. Babasaheb Khaparde has rightly said, 'The RSS has derived immense benefit because of this circular issued by the government; it has only helped in the growth of the Sangh and its work'. [3]

The government now realized that the foundations of the RSS were indeed strong. Even though its founder stayed away from day-to-day politics, his exemplary public life was capable of uniting nationalists belonging to different factions. The government's policy of wanting to appease the Muslim community through this circular also came a cropper, as the most popular Muslim leader of the province had openly praised the RSS and certified its non-sectarian character. In this regard, V.N. Shende wrote: "Our Sangh passed through all kinds of ordeals and shone with greater lustre. All its foes and carping commentators are defeated. The Sangh's ideology and methodology proved fully capable of meeting all crises. Following this, the RSS will now expand rapidly in other provinces too". [4]

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2 *Maharashtra;* March 21, 1934; p 4.
3 *Hedgewar Papers;* letter written by Dr Hedgewar to Kashinath Limaye; March 16, 1934.
4 V.N. Shende; *Parampoojneeya Dr Hedgewar,* Third Edition, 1943; p 21.

Confronting Imperialism

The confrontation between the RSS and British imperialism began much earlier than it was expected. Merely a few years after its formation the colonial administration realized that it was not gymnasium club like Hanuman Vyayamshala or a local adventure. RSS rapidly expanded outside the Central Provinces as its branches were opened in Delhi, United Provinces, Madras and other provinces of the country. It was not fashionable or romantic group of youths in uniform but ideologically it prepared the youth to sacrifice their lives for the motherland. Patriotic feelings and ideology formed the core of its training whether physical or mental. The government declared the Sangh as a "potential threat".

One of the reasons for its rapid expansion and the colonial government's hostility towards it was its vigorous role in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). Dr. Hedgewar wished to make the Sangh a truly pan-Indian organization and ensure its participation in the coming struggle against imperialism in a big way. Though hugely successful in his endeavour, Dr. Hedgewar's untimely death deprived contemporary national politics of his critical role. On his passing away in 1940, the government report on the RSS committee said, "After the Congress and its affiliated organizations, the RSS is India's biggest and most effective voluntary organization; in terms of the number of followers and importance, the RSS is second only to the Congress".[1]

Misconceptions about the RSS began receding gradually after the year 1930. Shende wrote in this regard, "In the early years, there were differing ideas about the Sangh in the minds of even its

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1 File No.4/1/40 *Home Political* (1), National Archives of India, New Delhi,p. 1.

ardent well-wishers. To many, the RSS appeared to be a gymnasium of sorts; a social service or a boy scouts organization to many others. Many in fact, out of a sense of belonging or imagined authority, would not hesitate to demand the Sangh cadres' presence at their meetings, conferences, weddings and processions. There was no dearth of normally intelligent people who actually believed that the RSS was a band of revolutionaries stockpiling arms and ammunition. Doctor Sahib (Hedgewar) was very vexed at this ignorance about the actual nature of the Sangh. Sometimes, he would also find it amusing and would laugh at this ignorance about the RSS". Referring to the notion other Hindu nationalists, particularly the Hindu Mahasabha, and the imperialists had about the RSS, Shende wrote, "But unfortunately, what the Sangh really is; what purpose it has been conceived for, the Sangh's well-wishers took much more time to understand than compared to its ill-wishers. This must truly be regarded as India's misfortune".[2]

The biggest hurdle the RSS faced in its expansion during this period was the local gymnasiums in the Central Provinces. They were upset at its spread, as they looked upon it as competitor. On occasions, these gymnasiums would also resort to the use of force to stop Sangh *shakhas* from functioning. The common grouse they had was that attendance at their gymnasiums suffered because of the RSS shakhas.[3] Dr Moonje noted in his dairy that they were "jealous of the Sangh and also did not have a good opinion about Dr Hedgewar". In 1929, Tejram, a Congress leader said at the inauguration ceremony of the Pratap Vyaayaamshaala, "These gymnasiums have been set up solely for providing physical training. There is no ideological background to them and therefore, the Sangh is different from them". Four years later, another prominent Congressman Jamnalal Bajaj too lent support to this view when he said, "Devoid of moral and ideological underpinning, it is not possible to utilize strength to the benefit of society". The RSS was rapidly expanding in the Central Provinces

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2 File No. 4/1/40 *Home Political* (1), National Archives of India, New Delhi,p. 20.
3 G.V. Deshmukh; *Kalsamudraanteel Ratne;* Veena Prakashan, Nagpur; p 159.

and was beginning to spread gradually in other provinces as well. 1,500 *swayam sevaks* attended the 1935 winter camp held at Nagpur. By 1936, there were 200 *shakhas* of the Sangh throughout the country with 25,000 *swayam sevaks*. Come 1938, this figure touched 350 with 40,000 volunteers. This rose to 500 and 60,000 *swayam sevaks* respectively by 1939 and at the beginning of 1940, the number of shakhas increased by a further 200, with an addition of a further 20,000 *swayam sevaks* to the RSS fraternity. While the number of shakhas remained constant at the beginning of 1941, the number of *swayam sevaks* had now reached 150,000.

Similarly, the number of trainees at the Officer Training Courses (OTCs) also grew proportionately. There were separate OTCs for student *swayam sewaks*. 500 boys participated at one such camp organized at Poona in December 1939. According to government reports, the summer camp at Nagpur was the most important. Specially chosen *swayam sevaks* from all over the country were imparted training at this camp in which all the senior leaders of the RSS were present. In 1938, 350 *swayam sevaks* from other provinces attended the summer camp. This number went up to 750 in 1939 and reached 1,232 the following year. Its training camp at Nagpur, held a few days before Dr. Hedgewar's death was truly reflective of the Sangh's all-India character. The *Mahratta* wrote, "There was an unanticipated crowd to witness the closing ceremony of the OTC. There were many important personalities from Nagpur and other parts of the country. Sangh leaders from other provinces were also present".

This was the last RSS programme of Dr. Hedgewar's life. He had been bedridden for the last 24 days. Despite his doctors' strict instructions, he was adamant about being present at the Nagpur OTC ceremony. He was finally given permission to do so. He delivered his last address to the OTC on June 9, 1940. In this speech, Dr Hedgewar demolished many misconceptions harboured by those who believed the RSS to be a worker-based movement rather than an ideological one. He said:

> "This year is very fortunate from the Sangh's point of view. Today, I see a small microcosm of the Hindu Rashtra before me. Though we do not know each other personally,

what is it that draws my heart to you all and yours to mine? The ideology of the Sangh is such that even those *swayam sevaks* who do not know each other personally can recognize each other. Despite differences in language and habits, why do *swayam sevaks* of Punjab, Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Sindh and other places have such affection for each other? It is solely because they are all part of the Sangh. The golden day when all of Bharat would be Sangh-ified will certainly dawn. There will then be no power on earth that can dare cast malicious eyes on the Hindus. We do not intend to attack anyone. But we have to be alert so that we do not suffer any attack. Bear in mind that merely going through our programmes or being present at the Sangh's place cannot be a substitute for the Sangh's real work. We have to organize the Hindu society spread from the Himalayas to the ocean. The real arena of our work is the Hindu world that lies outside the Sangh. The RSS is not just for its *swayam sevaks*, but also for the people outside its ambit, it is our duty to show the true path of progress to those people and this path can only be that of organization. The ultimate advancement of the Hindu people can only be through their organization."

In this final speech, Dr Hedgewar expounded the positive national purpose of the organization and laid out the goal of uniting and organizing the Hindu society. The popularity of the RSS was rapidly rising during these years, a fact that is borne by the increasing number of people present at its programmes and events, apart from its trained *swayam sevaks*. For instance, at its closing ceremony at Nagpur on December 30, 1938, 10 to 15 thousand people were present.[4]

Dr Hedgewar had worked in a focused and planned way for the expansion of the RSS. He had sought the assistance and cooperation of contemporary Hindutva leaders in ample measure, but had also taken care to keep the RSS free of external

4 *Kesari,* January 5, 1939.

intervention. He was well aware that there were ambitions galore among the leading people in the country's political life; personal ambitions that were a serious limit on their ability to work hard among the common people for the organizational purpose. Therefore, the RSS used these big names only for its expansion, or to preside over its ceremonies and functions. In a letter to *Sanghpracharak* Dadarao Paramarth written on August 27, 1934, he urged:

"After reaching Bombay, you should take along Dr Savarkar (Narayanrao) and Gopalrao to meet Jaykar and earnestly invite the barrister sahib to adorn the position of the presiding speaker of the Sangh's Dushera ceremony at Nagpur."

Following 1933-34, an increasing number of nationalists began attending RSS shakhas. Both the government's policy of isolating the Sangh and its disinterested criticism by other Hindutva organizations was now being countered through this mass contact, which was also instrumental in dispelling many misconceptions about the Sangh that had arisen because of false propaganda.

N.C. Kelkar, editor of the *Kesari* visited the RSS *shakha* at Nagpur on August 23, 1934 and spoke to *swayam sevaks*. Dr Hedgewar wrote, "Kelkar has set foot in the Nagpur shakha for the first time. His arrival was completely unexpected. He appears to have been very impressed by our *shakha's* programme and also accepted this during his interaction with us".

Gopal Chitale, editor of the *Prajapaksh* published from Akola became an ardent follower of Dr Hedgewar and involved himself directly in the RSS work. Many other newspapers and journals began propagating the programmes and principles of the Sangh. The *Kesari, Maharashtra, Maratha, Gyanprakash, Sawdhan, Danmitra, Prajapaksh* and *Kaal* were prominent among these. *Danmitra's* editor, Rao Sahib Mukund too, like Kelkar and Ogale, began attending RSS programmes. However, there also existed journals whose purpose was to simply oppose the RSS on any ground. *Navyug* and *Mathrubhoomi* were two such journals.

Dr Hedgewar's resolve was to strengthen the RSS at the national level. His letter of August 15, 1934 speaks as much, "A meeting of all *sanghchalaks* took place. It was decided in this meeting that there should be at least ten *shakhas* in every tehsil of every district. Our people have started working accordingly. Sangh work is not something that can be done at leisure or whenever time permits. We have to organize Maharashtra at the earliest and keeping this model before other provinces, have to organize all of India within a span of five to ten years".

Dr Hedgewar now undertook tours of other provinces. *Sanghpracharaks* from the Central Provinces began to be dispatched to other parts of the country, particularly Delhi, Ajmer, Marwar, Punjab and Madras. In this regard, he wrote to one of the well-wishers of the RSS: "We have not commenced the work of the Sangh for just one city or province. This endeavour has been undertaken so that all of our country is well organized at the earliest and our Hindu society becomes capable of protecting itself. This task cannot be fulfilled by merely collecting a few boys in one or two cities and playing around with them. It is for this reason that eminent people like you must enter the arena and generate the required wave through your efforts".

The RSS had to counter opposition at the political level too. Many leaders of the Congress, socialists and the Hindu Mahasabha were unhappy with the Sangh. Dr Hedgewar however, did not attach much importance to their opposition. Commenting on the malicious propaganda let loose against him by socialist politicians at Varanasi, he wrote on October 30, 1930, "One day before I reached Banaras, some students of the (Banaras) Hindu University distributed a pamphlet there, believing we would be disturbed by it. As soon as I reached there, Sangh members showed me the pamphlet. And in keeping with our constant policy, I requested all our members to simply ignore it".

Dr Hedgewar invited everyone to attend the programmes of the RSS, without any prejudice or preconceived notions whatsoever towards that individual. Thengdi's book *Kritagya Smaran* contains a list of all those who were associated with the RSS. These included people of all castes, communities, classes and

ideologies. While Congressmen were stirring up opposition to the RSS, Dr Hedgewar invited Prof M.B. Joglekar, a prominent Congress leader in Maharashtra to inaugurate the Sangh's Gondia (Central Provinces) camp in October 1935. In his inaugural speech, Joglekar said, "I am a Congressman. Despite my differences with the Sangh, I do not have an iota of doubt about its dedication and commitment to the nation. The RSS trains the youth for the nation's progress and welfare". [5]

N.V. Gunaji, Dadasaheb Mavlankar, Nanasaheb Sardesai, Govardhandas Gokuldas, R.N. Kanitkar, Nanasaheb Date, Halaji Pant Hirda, Dadasaheb Navre, Balvekar, Kamalabai and other Congress leaders from the Central Provinces and Maharashtra too attended the programmes and ceremonies of the RSS and praised its nationalist character. [6] Leaders from provinces in which the RSS was slated to expand would be invited to preside over the Sangh's ceremonies and events at Nagpur, Wardha, Poona and other established RSS centres. Their relationships would then be used by the *Sanghpracharaks* to initially expand their network in other provinces. Jaykar, Jamunadas Mehta, Sergeant Rajiv Kamat, Sergeant B.C. Chatterjee, Gokulchand Narang, Dr P. Varadarajalu Naidu and Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya were among those who not only presided over many RSS functions but also indirectly helped its efforts.

This in itself is testimony to Dr Hedgewar's organizational acumen. He would obtain the cooperation of everyone in the Sangh's work, but would not compromise an inch on the loftiness of his organization's principles nor its work. He once said: "Let no one harbour the arrogance that the Sangh works because of a certain individual. The Sangh is not the endeavour of any single individual, but of the entire community. Young and old alike have to come forward according to their capacity in order to fulfill this task. To those who ask what the Sangh has done, I pose this question what are you prepared to do for the Sangh?"

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5 *Kesari,* October 11, 1938.
6 All based on news published in the *Maharashtra* and *Kesari*.

World War II

Dr Hedgewar was carefully observing the events in world politics before the outbreak of the Second World War. At the time of the First World War, he had tried to implement his cherished plan of organizing an armed revolution against the British rulers, but could not do so owing to lack of wide support. He believed that two factors were essential for any revolution to succeed firstly, a committed organization and secondly; the country's imperialist rulers would have to be bogged in external events (international politics). This was the reason he strove day and night to make his organization a truly national one. Foreign domination chafed at his mind and spirit. In fact, he used to say *"Yaachidehiyaachidoka"*; meaning, he wished to see India free in this very life and before his eyes.

Dr Hedgewar's worries were on the rise even as the world drifted towards its next big armed conflict. He did not wish to let go of this opportunity. He was anxious to strengthen his organization to the utmost. His view was that the future of the Hindu nation was based on its present. He expressed his views in 1939 thus:

> "The Sangh is now fourteen years old. We know what we have done within the span of these years. Though huge challenges confront us, our work accomplished so far is no mean achievement either. We had reached the conclusion at the very outset that if India is a country of Hindus, the entire responsibility for its uplift lies primarily with the Hindus. We can under no circumstances shirk our responsibility for safeguarding and strengthening our own abode. It is both futile as well as improper to expect that outsiders, who have neither devotion nor affection for our country, are going to be of any help to us. And since we alone bear the responsibility for our uplift, there is no other path except that of organization".

Hedgewar also openly alluded to his ambition of a revolution against imperialism.

> "The Sangh has resolved to see the culmination of its work. There are many who say that this is a gigantic task and

> beset with innumerable difficulties. To this, I say that we knew that our path would be strewn with thorns. When did we ever expect that only a path of roses lay in store for us? The attainment of glory for any nation is not the subject of empty discussion, or any cheap item that can be purchased. It is that gem for which one has to be prepared to pay price in full, with not even a paisa less being acceptable. Who but you can sacrifice their all and strive to their utmost to obtain it? Who else but you can be the determinant of India's destiny? This will have to be accomplished by you and you alone".

Dr Hedgewar announced that the goal of the RSS was to attain freedom. Voicing his radical differences with those advocating 'patience' in attaining freedom, he said: "If we don't achieve freedom now, it will be impossible for us to gain it in the future. We had never claimed that we would achieve it in two days or two months. But at the same time, we do not want a situation wherein we would be working for generations without any result."

Finally, Hedgewar shed light on the role of the RSS in the situation arising out of the outbreak of the Second World War. The crisis for imperialism was an opportunity for Indian nationalism. His opinion was clear in this regard, "People say that the present hour is dark and perilous. I say that circumstances as favourable as never before. This is the time for us to work with all our heart and mind. Circumstances as fortuitous as the present opportunity didn't appear in the past, nor are they likely to in future. We have never been defeated during the last fourteen years and have not retracted our steps even once. How then can we lag behind now?"

Call it fate or Dr Hedgewar's extreme neglect of his own health; he began to remain ill from 1939 onwards. His illness took its toll, rendering him weak. Only a sensitive individual can experience the agony of the helplessness of one who sacrifices his all in his quest to strengthen the organization for the nation's freedom. WWII had broken out in September 1939 and Britain was truly beginning to feel its heat. Dr Hedgewar's mind too, was no less agitated. H.V. Kulkarni, former *Sarkaryavah* of the RSS writes, "Dr Hedgewar called me one night soon after the outbreak

of Second World War. He lay half-asleep, but he was worried. He confided to me his apprehension that we might possibly lose this second golden opportunity. He said, it was our responsibility to harness sufficient strength. But it seems the Almighty has something else in mind".

Call for Revolution

The physical, mental and ideological training provided to *swayam sevaks* at the *shakhas* and training camps had only one purpose freedom of the country. Without expressing it, the RSS leadership had cherished it in their minds. The Sangh leaders came from a revolutionary background. Dr Hedgewar himself had been an important part of the revolutionary movement in Bengal at the beginning of the century; other senior leaders too, came from a similar background. Dadarao Paramarth was a supporter of the revolutionary movement. The police had raided his home in 1924 and discovered 'objectionable' material and proscribed literature. He had met Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev in 1925 and attended secret meetings of revolutionaries in 1927. Umakant Apte, another RSS leader had been a schoolteacher who was thrown out of his job in 1924 because of the propagation of revolutionary ideas. The Sangh's maximum sympathy was for armed revolutionaries. When Rajguru went underground and moved to Nagpur after the slaying of British police official Saunders (responsible for the fatal lathi-charge on Lala Lajpat Rai), it was Hedgewar who had carefully kept him hidden. Had Rajguru accepted Hedgewar's advice and not moved to Poona, he would have escaped the police's clutches. Ghodke writes, "There was a lot of similarity between Indian revolutionaries and the RSS. Rajguru is an example of revolutionary influence upon the Sangh. It was natural for Dr Hedgewar to extend all help to Rajguru".[7]

Dr Hedgewar's mind was agitated and depressed when Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were hanged on March 23, 1931. Special commemorative functions were held at the Sangh's shakhas on March 24 to pay homage to these national heroes.

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7 H.M. Ghodke; *Revolutionary Nationalism in Western India;* p. 173-74.

Narration of stories of the lives and patriotism of national figures like Shivaji, Samarth Ramdas, Rani of Jhansi and Lokmanya Tilak, etc., became a daily routine at the *shakhas*. The biographies of Lenin, Mazzini, Garibaldi, Joan of Arc, Chiang Kai Shek, Shivaji, Tilakand among others would be read and discussed. Devendra Swaroop has written that Dr Hedgewar had developed revolutionary methods and strategies under the guise of a social movement, so that it could be concealed from the British. The intelligence department too, reported, "The RSS appears to be an open organization but observes a lot of secrecy. Only members are allowed during training. Even police officers are not allowed anywhere near its training area.Its *swayam sevaks* are organized into platoons, companies and battalions and severe discipline is implemented. Their uniform too, resembles that of military personnel. They are also being trained in shooting." [8]

The government's intelligence department was also concerned that the responsibility for imparting training had been assigned to a former army officer Martand B. Jog. Vande Mataram and other inspirational songs would be sung daily at the shakhas. One of the stirring songs was *Ran Bin Swatantrata Kaise Mile?* (Whither freedom without battle) Among the photographs of revolutionaries installed in the training camps was one of Raja Mahendra Pratap. How could young minds fail to be influenced by these things? The enthusiasm and sheer energy of *swayam sevaks* would sometimes reach such dizzying heights that they would themselves take some initiative without Dr Hedgewar's permission. In 1931, the second in command in the Sangh organization Balaji Huddar underwent punishment for his role in the Balaghat political dacoity conspiracy. Balasaheb Deoras along with many other *swayam sevaks* took the initiative to work for another secret organization. GopalraoYerkuntwar, a *swayam sevak* of Nagpur was badly injured in his attempts to manufacture home-made bombs. [9]

Dr Hedgewar's slogan of "organization for the sake of organization" was actually a forerunner of his preparations for a

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8 File No. 28/8/42; *Home Political* (1), National Archives of India, New Delhi.
9 Bhaurao Deoras; *Keshav SmaraamiSada* (Vol 1; Suruchi Sahitya);p11-12.

big struggle against imperialism. In October 1942, the police got hold of a letter written by a student *swayam sevak* of a college in Gwalior, which read,

> "You may be thinking that the Sangh will organize all Hindus of India or even the world. Our late leader Dr Hedgewar had, before his death, told all those working for the organization that one of the goals of the Sangh is to achieve membership of 3 and 1 per cent of the urban and rural populations respectively. These recruited members must be trained properly. He had also predicted that there would be an upheaval in 1942 and we should certainly be prepared for this. After meeting the goals of our membership, we shall make our move for freedom. We shall participate in this movement with arms". [10]

Last Hope for Revolution

Dr Hedgewar passed away on June 21, 1940. His health had begun failing from the end of 1939. He was particularly reliant on local treatment and natural therapies. His body and mind however, had absolutely no rest. Far from it; an ailing physique only exacerbated his burning nationalist fervour. This was best expressed in the following stanza composed after his death,

O Death! Venture not near!
For there are tasks still dear!
For me, death holds no worry;
The sun may fail, but not my resolve
The Motherland remains in chains of bondage
She cries out, but not a soul to listen
We shed our blood to free her from bondage
May our last breaths be for the Nation
Its flag be victorious; this is our vision
Then may you approach, O Death
To take us to your abode, fulfilling our final breath

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10 File No. 28/8/42; *Home Political* (1), National Archives of India, New Delhi.

The lustre of the RSS, which was sought to be portrayed as anti-Muslim and fascist in later years, now resembled the sun in its popularity, nationalist character and ability to make sacrifices for its cause. Nagpur had by now become a place of pilgrimage for the country's former revolutionaries and nationalists who wished to forge a common front against imperialism. All of them accepted the father-like personality and guidance of Dr Hedgewar, which had been built following thirty five years of sheer perseverance and hard work. The then position of the RSS was an outcome of Hedgewar's incessant toil and sacrifice; he had literally poured his physical frame, bit by bit into the sacrificial flames of the making of this organization. Nationalists from all over the country now began to flock to Nagpur. Dr Hedgewar was seriously ill, but this was known only to a few outside the RSS fold. Thus, those who were unaware of the state of his health would come with great hope but would return disappointed.

The revolutionaries of the *Anushilan Samiti* were the first ones to visit Dr Hedgewar at Nagpur. When he came face to face with him after a gap of two and a half decades, Hedgewar could not immediately recognize him. Upon Chakravarty's asking whether he remembered Kalicharan da, Dr Hedgewar embraced him warmly. Chakravarty had a long discussion with Hedgewar about the role of *swayam sewaks*. After this meeting, Chakravarty left for Varanasi.[11] Trailokyanath Chakaravarty writes, "When the Second World War seemed inevitable in 1939, the *Anushilam Samiti* members began propagating the idea of a revolution. They had met in the context of Subhash Chandra Bose's proposed armed revolution and finally decided that a revolution would take place under Bose's leadership".The Anushilan leaders had fanned out to different parts of the country to meet their former compatriots.

Another revolutionary Sacchidanand Sanyal too joined the RSS in 1940 and came to Nagpur for further discussion on revolutionary activities. Subhas Chandra Bose personally knew Dr Hedgewar since 1927. They had earlier met in Calcutta in 1928.

11Trailokyanath Chakravarty; *Thirty Years in Jail*; Alpha Beta Publications, Calcutta;p 272-279.

Bose was highly impressed with the Sangh and in a letter to Shankar Rao Deo, another Congressman he mentioned the positive influence the RSS training was having on youngsters. After resigning as the Congress President, Bose began making contact with Dr Hedgewar. A former *Sarkaryavah* (general secretary) of the RSS, Huddar (Balaji) came to Nagpur to meet Hedgewar in July 1939 as Bose's emissary along with another individual by the name of Shah. Hedgewar was then convalescing after a bout of pneumonia. He accepted the invitation to meet Bose immediately even as his health was actually continuously failing. Actually, when he was on his deathbed, Subhas Chandra Bose came to meet him on June 20, 1940. He sat for a while at Dr Hedgewar's side, and left after paying him obeisance. [12] This was the final salutation of one great nationalist to another. The very next day, i.e., June 21, 1940, Dr Hedgewar left for heavenly abode.

Colonial Repression

The government had by now, begun harassing the Sangh and its activists in different provinces and locations. For example, the Political Agent informed the Political Secretary of the Bhopal princely state that the RSS was secretly running a rifle club. He issued a warning to the princely state of Bhopal that the Sangh's activities should be curbed anyhow. A prominent activist of the RSS in the Central Provinces, Rajendra Ghate was tried in May 1934 under Section 107 of the Criminal Law Code.

The District Collector of Nasik district issued an order to his employees in 1938, preventing them from participating in any RSS activity. Loyalists of the regime who kept tabs on Sangh activist and reported on them were rewarded and also given official protection. There were thus many instances of people spying on the RSS, its programmes and military training in the hope of obtaining some reward or favours from the regime. An incident of this nature happened at Manawali village in December 1940, when the village head reported to the police about the Sangh's training camp. The

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12 *Hitvada*, 23 June 1940.

local police inspector Datar along with his police party promptly dashed to the village and warned the people not to help the RSS in any way.

These events continued. The British government was now truly apprehensive of any likely challenge that could emanate from the Sangh during wartime. For this reason, in June 1940, the government began mulling imposing a ban on the RSS under Criminal Law Amendment Act (XIV). But the administration in the Central Provinces refrained from actually implementing any such decision considering the strength of the Sangh. The government assessed the situation on the ground and reached the conclusion that any such move would result in a serious law and order crisis. The provincial government quietly passed on the buck to the central government and asked it to impose the ban on it at the national level. The Home Department of the government rejected such a proposal on the grounds that such a ban would draw Muslim outfits too in its ambit.

After lengthy discussions with the administrations of the provinces, the central government on August 5, 1940, finally imposed a ban on physical training, military style parades and other similar activities by voluntary organizations under Rules 58 and 59 of the Indian Security Act. The government of the Central Provinces expressed its inability to implement this order. According to the CP government, this would adversely affect the RSS as well as organizations like the Hanuman Vyaayaam Prasarak Mandal, as a result of which Hindus who were assisting Britain in the war would keep themselves aloof of the government's military effort as a result of any clash between it and the RSS. Yet, the Government expressed its dissatisfaction and instructed the provincial government to implement the central order with firmness.

In Dr Hedgewar's passing, the country had lost an ardent nationalist who dreamt and prepared the youth for an armed revolution against the imperialist but the force he created increasingly became not merely powerful but lent its strength for the Congress movement as well.

Synergy between Gandhi and Hedgewar

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's views on Gandhiji have been a subject of much debate in both political as well as academic circles after independence. Mahatma Gandhi's outlook and ideology gained prominence in India after 1920. He was the most popular and influential leader in India during the freedom movement. Many ideological movements were born within and outside the Congress during that time. Both Mahatma Gandhi's views about these movements and their leaders on one hand and the views of the leaders of those movements about Mahatma Gandhi on the other remains an important subject of study.

Much research has taken place with regard to the ideological differences between Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar on socio-political issues, the polemical assault by the Communists on Gandhi's economic philosophy platform, Gandhi's lack of sympathy for the country's revolutionaries and his opposition to the policies followed by Subash Chandra Bose. Unfortunately, issues like the relations between RSS and Mahatma Gandhi, and their differences at the ideological and practical levels have remained polemically debated. The reason for this can be attributed to the tussle over ideology and political power that followed in India after Independence.

While Jawaharlal Nehru was in thrall of socialism and the western point of view, other Congress leaders like Vallabhbhai Patel were more rooted to the country. Patel's uncompromising nationalism and his practical approach to and evaluation of pre-independence events, Partition, the integration of the erstwhile princely states earned him the support of non-Congress political forces too, among which the RSS was prominent. The polarization of the support bases of both leaders, both within and outside their

own party, was very much in process. Nehru and Patel were equally close to Gandhiji.

Along with Independence came the lightning blow of Partition. Some young followers of the Hindu Mahasabha held Gandhi directly responsible for the partition and considered him to be sympathetic only to Muslim and Pakistani interests and demands. Highly angered at this, they conspired to assassinate Mahatma Gandhi. On January 30, 1948, one such Hindu youngster Nathuram Godse shot Gandhi dead, right in the middle of his prayer meeting in Delhi. It was a moment of shock for the people who had adored Gandhi as 'Mahatma' and blindly supported his leadership and programmes. Godse's act of madness shamed the Hindu mind to a great extent.

Four months prior to his death, Mahatma Gandhi visited a refugee camp in Bhangi Basti, Delhi set up by RSS workers for those displaced in the wake of Partition. Gandhi had a candid discussion with RSS workers. While Gandhiji was happy at this environment of openness, the Sangh's *swayam sevaks* got an opportunity to meet and know Gandhi at close quarters. But the Central Government laid the blame for Gandhi's tragic assassination at the door of the RSS and slapped a ban on it, without any proof. There was no consensus between Prime Minister Nehru and Patel then the country's Home Minister over this issue. Patel wrote to Nehru saying, "The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has nothing to do with this deed (the assassination of Gandhi). Doubtlessly, the RSS can be held guilty of other misdeeds or faults, but not this."After the ban was issued on February 4, 1948, it was not unnatural that people by and large would believe the RSS to be hostile to Gandhi. Although the two commissions of inquiry constituted to examine the conspiracy to kill Gandhiji did not consider the RSS to be guilty of any conspiracy, and absolved it of all charges and the Central Government too had to rescind the ban on Sangh on July12, 1948, the accusation of having a hand in the killing of a popular leader came to stick. Marxist writers made a living out of defaming the RSS in the intelligentsia, and the image of RSS was made out to be anti-Gandhi and an organization given to violent nature and action. As a result, Dr. Hedgewar's thoughts and those of Gandhi were now seen as mutually opposing.

Dr. Hedgewar's contributions in the country's freedom struggle have been mentioned in the preceding chapters. Despite his training under Lokmanya Tilak in his formative years, Hedgewar used his own reasoning to assess Gandhi and his movement. He was of course, influenced by Gandhi's outlook on life and his ability to imbibe lofty principles in his own character. Dr. Hedgewar considered the Mahatma to be the most competent person to lead a mass movement against imperial rule. Gandhi's anti-imperialist stance and his use of methods, symbols and idioms which were born from the freedom movement brought Hedgewar close to Gandhi.

Before and even after establishing RSS, Hedgewar had participated in all movements under Gandhi's leadership with total dedication. His involvement in the Non-cooperation Movement was in opposition to the views of the Tilakites of the Central Provinces. He had disassociated himself from the 'Rashtriya Mandal' to form the 'Nagpur National Union', because of the former's negative views about Gandhi.

Dr. Hedgewar did differ fundamentally from Gandhi, who staunchly believed that non-violence was the ideal route to achieve independence and disliked those who propagated other ways. He had not the least sympathy for the revolutionary movement. On the issue of independence, Dr. Hedgewar believed Gandhi's path to be the most ideal. He had participated in both the Non-cooperation as well as Civil Disobedience movements. Hedgewar and his *swayam sevaks*, trained in paramilitary methods, adhered to the Gandhian principles of non-violence and maintained the sanctity of his movements till the end. Despite this, Dr. Hedgewar refused to accept that the patriotism of the adherents of other ways to attain freedom, or the sanctity of the means they adopted was questionable. He would say that he was willing to polish the shoes of the British to achieve freedom if need be, but would also be ready to use their shoes to flog them if the situation demanded. All ways and means were open to him; he harboured no prejudice against any particular way. To Dr. Hedgewar, ousting the British from the country and freeing it of their rule was paramount.

Dr. Hedgewar believed that apart from knowledge, learning and values, a nation should also be powerful. Non-violence could be successful only if it had the requisite strength. By strength, he meant national consciousness and the power of organization. He had said, "There can be no protection without strength". In organization alone lay real strength; such an organization must be impervious to disintegration and be capable of squarely facing any aggression.

Muslim Question

The Congress during the freedom movement was trying its best to expand its base, which any national organization should do. The Muslims kept aloof from the freedom struggle. They considered the Congress a 'Hindu party' and maintained their distance from it. Had the Congress adequately defined nationality and culture of this country and articulated the struggle against colonialism in accordance with it, then Muslim aloofness would not have culminated in separatism. The more the Congress tried to bring Muslims closer to itself, the more the bargaining power of the Muslim League increased. The unending bid to coax the Muslims to join the freedom movement by accepting all their demands, wishes and conditions became the *de facto* Congress policy of appeasement. The seeds of discord and separatism in the country were sown with the founding of the Muslim League in 1906. During the entire freedom movement, the only scenario that arose was that the freedom of India and the Muslim identity were two separate issues. As a result, the Hindu Mahasabha, which had been established for the social and cultural revival underwent a major transformation in its character. The Congress silence vis-à-vis growing Muslim intransigence led to the Mahasabha becoming an aggressive Hindu organization.

Dr. Hedgewar considered the incessant Congress harping of Hindu-Muslim unity, and the thinking behind it, to be faulty. His simple question was: "Are there no other religions or their followers in this country? Why then do we talk only of Hindu-Muslim unity and not about the unity of all communities?' He firmly believed that the people of a country might practice different religions but were of a single nationality, not different ones. In

December, 1935, Hedgewar delivered a speech during a training session of RSS workers in Arvi in Wardha district. Throwing light on this very issue, he said, "Gandhiji talks of Hindu-Muslim unity and so do I. But our outlook slightly differs from his. According to Gandhi, an average Muslim is a bully and an average Hindu is a coward. He wishes to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity by appeasing Muslims. In response to this state of mind, I would like recite a stanza from the Mahabharata, which says:

Yayorevsamamvittamyayorevsamam balam
Tayorvivahomaitree cā na tu pushavipushtayoho

(Marriage or friendship can happen between people of equal status, not between those who are unequal).

Dr Hedgewar went on to say, "I feel Muslims believe they are more organized in comparison to Hindus. Till such time they feel so there can be no unity between Hindus and Muslims. The day when they will realize that the Hindus too have become an organized force and are capable of attaining freedom on their own they will join the national mainstream on their own".[1]

On 16th April, 1932, when the Communal Award was announced, Dr. Hedgewar staunchly opposed it. He cautioned people that "the poisonous seed of separatism in the form of this Communal Award would lead to the partition of India in future".[2] Dr. Hedgewar was dead against the British policy of politicizing relations between Hindus and Muslims.

As the editor of the *Swatantrya,* Hedgewar had written in one of his editorials: "Among the reasons sought to be peddled as justification for British rule in India, Hindu-Muslim discord is held out as one. The British say that if they leave India Hindus and Muslims would start fighting with each other, leading to a huge conflict. All this is totally incorrect. The advent of British imperialism was not on account of strife between Hindus and Muslims. On the contrary, differences between Hindus and

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1 Based on an interview with Dattopant Thengadi; February 6, 2002.
2 H.V. Seshadri; *The Tragic Story of Partition;* 1982; p 104.

Muslims exacerbated after the British entered India. Even if the two communities are in mutual conflict, what right do the British have to interfere? Can they intervene in a conflict between different groups in European countries? Hindus and Muslims are capable of resolving their differences. A Hindu does not differentiate among the sons of his motherland and all good Muslims fall under this category".[3]

Indian Muslims belong to the same historical race, civilization and culture as do Hindus and followers of other faiths. Hence Dr. Hedgewar considered all Indians as belonging to one nationality on the basis of their common civilization, culture and race which he defined as the Hindu Nation.

Dr. Hedgewar further said, "Ever since the struggle for freedom began, the distance between Hindus and Muslims has only increased. Leaders have tried several ways to bring about unity between the two communities, but all have failed. It was then that they thought they could bring about unity through an agreement. The 'Bengal Pact' was a result of this thinking. This Pact proved helpful for the Swaraj party in their tussle against the bureaucracy in the Bengal Assembly. But what is the meaning of the Pact? In effect, it meant that Hindus would have to give special privileges to the Muslims so that they (the Muslims) would agree to join them in the fight against the British. But let us go a little deeper and ponder will the attainment of Swaraj be to the benefit of Hindus alone? No! This issue concerns all the people of the country. Why then do Muslims put conditions for joining the freedom movement? The very idea of independence negates the demand for privileges to any community".[4]

Dr. Hedgewar wished to ignore the Muslim question while the struggle against imperialism loomed large. In the light of increasing riots between Hindus and Muslims and atrocities committed against women, Dr. Hedgewar was of the view that rather than forming a Hindu militia, Hindus ought to organize themselves to combat the threats to their community. It is

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3 *Swatantrya;* March 13, 1924.
4 *Swatantrya;* June 30; 1924.

instructive to glean the views of Gandhi, Dr Hedgewar and Dr. Moonje on the Hindu-Muslim problem.

Gandhi followed a policy of appeasement of the Muslims, as he believed he could win their hearts and overcome their aloofness towards the freedom movement. Dr. Moonje and the Hindu Mahasabha wished to put an end to this problem through majoritarianism and aggressive Hinduism. Dr. Hedgewar's views differed from both. He presented an original solution to this problem. He believed if the Hindus organized themselves in a positive manner and overcame the social contradictions in their own society, their dedication to nationalism was the only way to permanently alter the Muslim thought process.

Essence of Gandhism

Dr. Hedgewar did not consider Gandhian thought as only an ideology, but as a pure outlook for those in public life. It is indeed an irony that many outstanding individuals are trapped in 'isms' and then reduced to tokenism, even as his followers go about ritualizing his life, thoughts and philosophy. Dr Hedgewar believed that the followers of Gandhiji had no intention of adopting the original principles of Gandhism while outwardly wishing to appear Gandhian.

Severe despondency had settled in the country and also in the Congress unit of the Central Provinces following the calling off of the Non-cooperation Movement. The Tilakites had never been in favour of such a movement. When Dr Hedgewar returned to Nagpur after serving a year's jail sentence, Gandhi's birthday was being celebrated on October 2, 1922. Dr. Hedgewar was invited to preside over a gathering on the occasion. This was a testimony to his image and popularity among the Gandhians of the province. Dr Hedgewar said on the occasion, "This is an auspicious day, a day of listening to Gandhiji's virtues and reflecting upon them. Gandhi Jayanti is an important day, particularly for those who call themselves followers of Gandhi".

Hedgewar went on to state some hard facts. "The biggest virtue of Gandhiji is his ability for great sacrifices for the sake of

attaining his goals. Gandhiji does not like people with dual personalities; those who talk of dedication to the goal, but do not act according to it. Gandhiji's aims will not attain fulfilment if people merely raise their hands in his support and sing his praises, but make a mockery of his principles in their personal lives and hanker after luxuries of life." [5]

The next part of Dr. Hedegwar's speech described Gandhi's message of 'non-violence' and 'peace'. Explaining this, Hedgewar said that this did not mean becoming weak and helpless. He said, "The ideal of peace is ineffective and meaningless for those who are weak. It has meaning only when people become as strong as those who seek to oppress them. It you are true followers of Gandhiji then you should be ready to leave your homes and families, and be ready to sacrifice for the country".

Congruence in principles and practice is of utmost importance for any political worker. Dr. Hedgewar did not like politicians with dual personalities and had little hesitation in sometimes pulling them up even in public. One such incident of January 15, 1927 stands out. The Congress Legislative Party of the Central Provinces had organized a public meeting at Nagpur's town hall. Moropant Abhyankar was chairing this meeting. Narayanrao Kelkar, a prominent Congress leader and also a minister in the provincial government was also present on stage. As soon as he got up to speak, Dr. Hedgewar remarked "Are you a Congress worker? If so, then why are you wearing a western hat instead of a Gandhi cap?" [6]

In the political milieu of that period, the Gandhi cap had come to symbolize India's nationalism. Government employees were not allowed to wear it. In this regard, the *Maharashtra* observed, "The slogan of 'Vande Matram' in 1906-07 would make imperialists see red; they now take offence at the Gandhi cap as well. Judges used to view Gandhi cap with contempt". Dr. Hedgewar made a scathing attack on the political character that saw nothing wrong in leading a double-faced life.

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5 *Maharashtra*; November 3, 1922.
6 *Hitvada*; January 16, 1927.

Use of Khadi

Khadi was an inseparable part of the constructive programme of Gandhi. Dr. Hedgewar would wear only Khadi. After his release from jail, he was gifted clothes made of Khadi and a *Charkha* (spinning wheel) as a mark of honour at a function organized to felicitate him. In his public meetings in Katol, Vani, Chanda and other places, he stressed on the increased use of Khadi [Ref: *Hitvada;* January 16, 1927]. Hedgewar said in his speeches, "Khadi not only symbolizes the nation's identity, but is a source of employment to thousands of people".

It was because of his pressure that Nagpur's Congress Committee was forced to allocate separate funds for propagating Khadi. The *Young Patriot* while commenting on this incident, observed, "Gandhiji has lent his full strength to the promotion of Khadi and *Charkha*. Though several Congressmen do not use either of them. The Congress Committee of Nagpur was forced to allocate funds for the purpose only after one of its ministers threatened to resign".

In February 1934, Dr. Hedgewar organized a three-day meeting of all prominent *swayam sevaks* on the issue of the use of *Swadeshi* goods. He told them, "We should use clothes made from Khadi as far as possible. Unfortunately production of fabric from raw cotton is not sufficient to meet our demands. Patriotic citizens must therefore use clothes made by *Swadeshi* mills and weavers. While using such goods we must ensure that the head underneath the *Swadeshi* cap should also be *Swadeshi"*.

After a three-day conclave, the Sangh determined its own policy regarding *Swadeshi* in the light of changed circumstances. Dr. Hedgewar declared Khadi to be the symbol of *Swadeshi* and *Swaraj*. This declaration of his became the new mantra for *swayam sewaks*. He announced the Sangh's decision to run the Swadeshi campaign. Swayamsewaks were not to force patriots to wear Khadi, though. People were to be encouraged to adopt *Swadeshi* goods as much as possible. The production of Khadi in the country was not adequate to meet everyone's needs. Therefore, cloth made

in Indian mills and by weavers was also to be part of this campaign.[7]

The RSS considered this constructive programme of Mahatma Gandhi to be a national initiative, rather than specific to a person or organization. The Sangh's joining the Khadi and *Swadeshi* initiative broke the social and political impasse that had set in the province after the Civil Disobedience Movement. Political activity now began afresh. The fortnightly report of the government's intelligence department said, "The RSS is working for the increased sale of Khadi and also the boycott of foreign goods". The government arrested many RSS workers in this connection.

Harijan Yatra and RSS

Mahatma Gandhi did not neglect social issues even during the freedom struggle. It was because of this that he made removal of untouchability an integral part of all Congress programmes. After the Civil Disobedience Movement, Gandhi toured many provinces of the country for the propagation of this cause alone, dedicating an entire year to this particular programme. Gandhi began his campaign against untouchability on November 17, 1933 visiting Wardha's Ram temple, with his campaign culminating in August 1934. In this tour, he travelled about 12,500 km. and collected about eight lakh rupees from the people across India for the cause. This campaign of Gandhi came to be popularly known as his *'Harijan Yatra'*.

Although the Congress had agreed to the Harijan campaign, there was no enthusiasm in the organization for this cause. All top leaders of Congress were associated only symbolically. Even before the commencement of his '*Harijan Yatra*', Gandhi had realized the truth that the heart and soul of Congress workers was not in any constructive endeavours. He wrote: "If I depend solely on the Congress for this, no major reform can happen in the Hindu religion. I am aware that all Indians are not Congressmen and

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7 *Maharashtra*; July 19, 1922; p 11.

neither are all Hindus members of the Congress. Gandhiji's *Harijan yatra* made the issue of social equality in among the Hindus an important one, both in principle and practice. Various organizations supported or opposed this cause in keeping with their social base and philosophy. Dr. Ambedkar considered this initiative of Gandhi to be a superficial effort, and his supporters therefore opposed it. On the other hand, an orthodox section of Hindus considered it "an assault on the Hindu faith". Members of this section even showed black flags to Gandhi at many places along his *yatra.* Unfortunately, many of Hindu Mahasabha leaders opposed Gandhi's campaign against untouchability and also publicly gave vent to their views. Among them was Bhai Parmanand.

Evaluating the social importance of *Harijan Yatra*, Dr. Hedgewar said: "Every endeavour for social harmony strengthens Hindu society and all such endeavours should be lent all assistance as possible". He considered the solidarity with Harijans by the rest of the society and their joining the mainstream a sacred national task and the moral and hallowed responsibility of all Hindus. The RSS had even organized several public meeting against the Communal Award and in support of a unified electoral system. Dr. Hedgewar utilized the good offices of the leaders of Hindu Mahasabha to arouse people against the Communal Award. Of the leaders Bhai Parmanand who was totally opposed to Gandhi and his ways, also openly opposed his *Harijan Yatra* at one of the Sangh's public meetings. The government's intelligence department's files mentioned this to be the thinking of Dr. Hedgewar and the RSS because it was Hedgewar who had organized this particular meeting. But how wrong this report was can be understood from the following facts.

A public meeting was organized at Nagpur on November 5, 1933, as part of preparations for *Harijan Yatra*. A welcome committee of five persons was formed, which included Martandrao Jog, a central office bearer of the RSS. Jog was assigned the responsibility of the weapons and paramilitary training of the Sangh's commandant *swayam sevaks*. As part of the reception committee for Gandhi's programme, Jog was given the additional responsibility of publicity for the programme as well as ensuring

discipline in it. RSS *swayam sevaks* played the tune of the national song and saluted the meeting as part of their effort to ensure its success. Apart from Jog, other prominent *swayam sevaks* and the *Maharashtra's* editor Ogle too garlanded Gandhi on stage, from the point of view of attendance, discipline and arrangements, this public meeting was a grand success.

Similarly, when Gandhi reached Gondia, the *swayam sevaks* welcomed him playing their band and greeted him with a salute.[8] The Congress unit in Gondia solicited the active support of the RSS. One reason for this was that there were many *swayam sevaks* who were also members of the local Congress unit there. Unfortunately, because of the bitterness that had crept between the Congress and the Sangh at some places, local organizers did not seek RSS help. After his *Harijan Yatra*, Gandhi had come to realise that Congress was with him as a matter of formality, but its workers could not embrace this idea of his.

Analysis of the RSS

It were not just the British who portrayed a mysterious and sinister image of RSS training camps. There were many individuals and organizations in the country who were opposed to the Sangh and were its bitter critics. None of them, however, had any knowledge about the composition of the RSS or its programmes and initiatives. Neither did they have any opportunity of actually obtaining a first-hand experience of this. Mahatma Gandhi as a politician, stood out from this crowd. He wished to gain a first-hand experience of how the RSS functioned and also wanted to meet its founder. Gandhi's base was at Wardha, which had become the second most effective and influential centre of the RSS after Nagpur. The annual winter camp of RSS in 1934 was to be held at Wardha, not very far off from Gandhi's ashram. *Swayam sevaks* had begun preparations for this a fortnight in advance. Gandhiji closely monitored the discipline and the brotherly affection among them. This further whetted his desire to visit the camp and he conveyed his wish to his aide Mahadev Desai. Desai wrote to Appaji Joshi,

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8 *Hitvada;* November 16, 1934; p 3.

former General Secretary of the Central Provinces Congress and one of the most influential leaders of RSS in the province, saying, "Though Gandhiji is very busy, he wants to take time from his busy schedule to visit your camp. Kindly let me know the date and time".

In response to Mahadev Desai's message, Appaji went to the Gandhi ashram at Wardha and invited him to visit the camp at his convenience. Gandhi visited the RSS camp on December 25, 1934, along with Jamanlal Bajaj, Miraben, Mahadev Desai and others who lived with him in his Wardha ashram.

This event which is a fact is often dismissed as fictitious. Else, it sought to be presented in distorted manner. It is claimed that the Sangh misuses Gandhiji's name to gain respectability. What is even more surprising is that even a newspaper controlled by a Congress leader of the Central Provinces, Birjalal Biyani, too termed this meeting as false news. [9] This is a clear example of the anti-RSS mentality. In 1939 Gandhi himself had accepted the fact in a Sangh meeting that he had visited an RSS training camp. Again, on December 16, 1947, Gandhi addressed RSS workers in a refugee camp they had set up in Delhi. The *Hindustan Times* said in its report, "Gandhiji has said that he had visited an RSS camp located at Wardha years ago. Dr. Hedgewar, the RSS founder, was alive then. The late Jamanlal Bajaj had escorted him to the camp and he recalled being very impressed with the discipline and the absence of untouchability among RSS workers". [10]

At 6.00 am on December 25, 1934, Gandhi arrived at Wardha's RSS camp and saluted the saffron flag of RSS in the traditional Sangh way. After watching the parade and other activities, he wished to interact with the workers. Gandhi asked a *swayam sevak* while there were portraits of Ram and Krishna in their camp, there were none of Lord Shiva and Ganesha. Didn't the RSS consider them divine? He was stunned by the response who said that the Sangh mounted the portraits of national heroes and

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9 *Mathrubhumi;* June 23, 1939; Article by V.V. Aayaachit "Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangha apaasoon Rashtra Sewa Hone Ashakya"; p 5.
10 *The Hindustan Times;* November 17, 1947; p 2.

leaders, not those of gods and goddesses. Gandhi was also pleasantly surprised to learn that *swayam sevaks* were attending this camp at their own expense.

Gandhi now tried to find out to which caste those *swayam sevaks* belonged. He was awestruck when he found out that RSS workers comprised all the castes, which included Brahmins, non-Brahmins and the so-called untouchable (Mahar) castes, who lived, worked, ate and played together. One RSS worker told him, "Neither do we know anyone's caste and nor do we wish to. We have only one caste and that is Hindu."Gandhi had visited the RSS camp four months after the completion of his *Harijan Yatra.* After seeing this highly positive spirit, his curiosity regarding the organization's activities were satisfied somewhat, but his desire to meet the RSS founder increased manifold.

Dr. Hedgewar reached the Wardha camp on December 26, 1934 to attend its winter closing ceremony. He was informed about Gandhiji's visit to the camp. He proceeded the same day to meet Gandhi with two of his colleagues. Appaji Joshi had managed this appointment at about 8.30 in the evening. The conversation between these two national figures was similar to that between the Yaksha and Yudhishthir in the *Mahabharata* (Yudhishthir, the eldest of the Pandav brothers, was tested by a Yaksha during the Pandavs' twelve-year exile in the forest). Hedgewar's discussion with Gandhi proceeded as follows:

Mahatma Gandhi: You must have known by now that I had visited the camp.

Dr. Hedgewar: It is our fortune that you visited our camp. I had no knowledge about your programme; else, I would have been present.

Mahatma Gandhi: In a way, it was good that you were not present. I was able to interact with *swayam sevaks* in a frank and open atmosphere and learnt a lot of things.

Gandhi now wanted to know about the Sangh's finances. He assumed that the RSS must be receiving donations from the rich. Jamanlal Bajaj was known to be a prominent donor of the Sangh.

When he came to know that far from gathering money from Bajaj or anyone else, the RSS relied on *guru dakshina*, he was astonished. Upon learning of Dr Hedgewar's previous background in the Congress, Gandhi asked him why he hadn't been able to succeed in the Congress, Was it because of lack of adequate financial assistance?

Dr. Hedgewar: It was not a question of money. The mental setup of the Congress is that of a political organization. In political circles, our *swayam sevaks* are looked upon as mere labourers, meant to arrange chairs and tables or do some such work. This is not a mindset that can produce self-motivated activists dedicated to the uplift of the country.

Mahatma Gandhi: What do you *swayam sevaks* think?

Dr. Hedgewar: There should be no leader or worker in an organization. All are *swayam sevaks*. When someone comes forth to work for the society and country, his role isn't one of arranging a few pieces of furniture, but that of the foundation stone of nation-building. He does extraordinary work in spite of leading an ordinary life. It is because of this inner conviction amongst all *swayam sevaks* that the RSS is able to produce newer *sevaks* with little finance and amidst many difficulties.

Mahatma Gandhi: Yesterday I saw people from different castes working together. How have you been able to achieve this?

Dr. Hedgewar: It is by arousing nationalism in their consciousness and their pride in being Hindus, that have risen over narrow concepts and thinking.

Gandhiji was even happier when he learnt that Dr. Hedgewar was a bachelor and earning a livelihood in order to dedicate his life to the nation's freedom and Hindu organization. It was for the first time in his long years in public life that Gandhi met an individual who was action-oriented, able, honest, holistic and utterly devoid of any personal ambition. He expressed his good wishes for the success of the Sangh's mission. It was because of this image of RSS in Gandhi's mind after his meeting with Dr. Hedgewar that he visited an RSS camp without any hesitation in the immediate

aftermath when the country had been torn apart by Hindu-Muslim riots. Terrible violence raged between Hindu and Muslim outfits and the atmosphere was one of atrocities and mutual hatred. Gandhi visited a refugee camp set up by the RSS, saluted its flag and even prayed along with *swayam sevaks*.

It was because of this that the *Harijan*, a newspaper brought out by Gandhi that demanded the removal of the ban imposed on the RSS after Gandhi's assassination. Its editorial termed this act as a violation of Gandhi's beliefs and principles. The *Harijan's* editorial on this issue is now a historical document.

Dr. Hedgewar had accorded great respect to Gandhi as a noble soul and a nation-builder. It was because of Hedgewar's inspiration that Gandhi's name came to be included in the names of those whom the RSS mentions in its morning prayers. Once when a Savarkarite and a Gandhian were arguing about who was greater, Dr. Hedgewar who happened to intervene said, 'This is "like debating which is better - the rose or the jasmine. Neither is similar to the other. One can argue about their respective superiority on the basis of their attributes like beauty, fragrance and softness. Even so, rather than thinking about quashing one another's flower, one should enjoy the beauty of both".

On the issue of Muslim appeasement and the definition of nationalism and national identity, there were unmistakable differences between Dr. Hedgewar and Gandhi. In spite of this, Dr. Hedgewar did not let their mutual differences obstruct his participation in the national movement.

A Tireless Crusader

A set of thinkers, reformers and leaders are found in every nation who expound social and national issues, as well as pursue the mundane and explain the esoteric, even as they organize the society and nation. The list of such personalities in India is rather a long one. Individuals like Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and Bhagat Singh belong to this category. Yet, Dr. Hedgewar stands out as the rarest of the rare, who established a hallowed tradition of selfless and dedicated service of the nation. He was an inspiration for those who worship the nation. His inspiration, undoubtedly effective in his short life of only fifty one, is even more potent now, decades after his death. It was the saga of his incessantly active life and its innumerable instances, his limitless ability to make great sacrifices which inspired countless others to emerge from the confines of family life and work for the nation.

There was not even a thin line between his private and public life. Long before he founded the RSS, he had given up all traditional practices, expectations and personal bondages associated with family. By 1925, he had immersed completely in Nagpur's public life and in the next fifteen years, his real social circle and dimensions had transcended Nagpur to cover the entire country. When Dr. Hedgewar breathed his last in 1940, the organisation he had founded had grown into a truly national one. The Sangh had established its *shakhas* in all provinces and major cities and districts of country. Its *swayamsevaks* had become the centre of attraction for political leaders not just from the Central Provinces. The RSS had already made a deep impact on the minds of the country's topmost leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Vithalbhai Patel, Veer Savarkar and Netaji Subash Chandra Bose among others. The life and deeds of its founder are exemplary. Reflecting

upon Hedgewar, one must concede that such individuals are born once in centuries, perhaps for a special purpose.

Personality Cult

Political life in India, both before and after independence, is replete with innumerable examples of mutual bitterness arising out of personal clashes or serious ideological differences, and the desire for leadership and control. It is extremely pertinent to mention here the acrimonious differences between Mahatma Gandhi and Subash Chandra Bose, leading to a serious fissure in the Congress in 1939 itself. It is commonplace for critics of the RSS to slap labels like 'The Commander of RSS', 'Dictator' and 'Fuehrer' on Dr. Hedgewar.Reality, however, is entirely different. In 1928, three years after the RSS was founded, it adopted the tradition of *Guru Puja* (worship of the guru) on the occasion of *Gurupurnima*. *Swayamsevaks* close to Dr. Hedgewar assumed that it was Dr. Hedgewar who would be worshiped as their*guru*. Some others believed that Chhatrapati Shivaji or his guru Samarth Ramdas would be worshiped. But Dr. Hedgewar forbade the worship of any individual. His address on the occasion of the Sangh's first *guru-dakshina* bears mention:

> "Instead of according any individual the place of its *guru* (preceptor), the Sangh has given this honour to the pristine saffron flag. The reason for this is that howsoever great a person may be, he cannot be perfect. Hence,rather than invite ridicule by making any individual our *guru*,it is our history, tradition and nationalism, symbolized by the saffron flag that is to be worshipped. The energy and enthusiasm that emanates from this flag will far exceed that coming from any human being".

Eleven years later in 1939, speaking at the session of the Hindu Yuvak Parishad at Poona, Dr. Hedgewar had emphatically told the younger generation, "Never follow any leader blindly. One ought to think independently while making any decision".[1]

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1 *The Mahratta;* May 6, 1939.

Hedgewar kept the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh apart from the prevalent cult of hero worship. One can well reckon how difficult it is for any successful organizer to guard against self-aggrandizement, adulation and publicity. It is to Dr. Hedgewar's credit that he did not ever let the Sangh become a tool for his fame or popularity. He regarded the prevalent trait of hero-worship to be thebiggest bane of Hindu society. He even held this to be the cause of the downfall of our society and nation. Hedgewar stated that the Sangh wanted to wipe out this pernicious individualismand re-establish pure nationalism.[2]

The negation of hero worship is now an integral part of the RSS functioning. This became evidentwhen Dr. Hedgewar passed away. Sergeant Sanjiv Kamath, a Hindu leader with sympathies for the Sangh had remarked, "Without the able guidance of Dr. Hedgewar the Sangh faces a dark future". Similar sentiments were voiced by both the sympathizers and the detractors of the RSS. But it was because of the healthy foundation Dr. Hedgewar had laid, that the Sangh continued to function the way it used to when he was alive. Two months after his death, a leading English daily *Mahratta* published an article on its front page with the headline, "Dr. Hedgewar's Sangh Still Going Strong".[3]

The address of the next *Sarsanghchalak*, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar,on the occasion of the second monthly *shradh* (death anniversary) of Dr. Hedgewar, is very pertinent in this context. Addressing a public meeting organized at Nagpur on 22nd August, 1940,Guruji (the name by which M.S. Golwalkar was known), "The absence of the Sangh's founder Hedgewar haunts our minds, but this should not make us panic, because Sangh has never endorsed hero worship nor will it do so in future".[4]

Such inspiration from this mighty institution's founder was born not merely of ideological doctrine. Infact Dr Hedgewar practiced what he preached, demonstrating his willingness and

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2 *Kaal;* June 23, 1940.
3 *The Mahratta;* August 23, 1940; p 1.
4 *The Mahratta;* August 23, 1940; p 1.

ability to abide the principles he espoused till his last breath. No biography of his, whether major or otherwise, could be published during his lifetime. Dr Hedgewar remorselessly discouraged any such attempt. Damodar Pant Bhatt, a writer from the Central Provinces wrote to Dr. Hedgewar, requesting him to send information on his life along with a few photographs. Finally, Dr. Hedgewar wrote to him in reply:

"I am grateful to you for the respect and affection you have for me and the Sangh. Yourdesire is to publish a biography on my life.However, I donot think I am so illustrious or have done anything great in my life that merits publishing. Also, there are no photographs available of either me or of the Sangh's programmes or events. Briefly, all I wish to state is that I don't think I fit anywhere in the list of those whose biographies ought to be written. I shall be very grateful if you donot endeavour to do so". [5]

This letter had been written in 1935.Till then there was actually no photograph of Dr. Hedgewar in Sangh uniform. It was only the unyielding stubbornness of *Sanghchalak* Kashinath Limaye that made Dr. Hedgewar agree to be photographed on May 2, 1935 in Sangh uniform.He gave his assent only on the condition that the negative of the photograph would be destroyed and the photograph would not be published.

In another incident, an educationist from Nasik and RSS leader, Ram Gosavi, wrote to Dr. Hedgewar requesting him to write a preface for an anthology of speeches the former had given on the RSS. Hedgewar turned down this request too. In his reply, Dr. Hedgewar wrote, "There is no place in the organizational scheme of things for self-promotion, self-glorification or personal ambition. The arduous promotion of personality can never let the organizational edifice stand firm".

Another incident depicts Dr. Hedgewar's total aloofness from fame, now known in RSS terminology as "*Prasiddhi Parangmukhta"* (detachment from fame or publicity).Jagadguru

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5 *The Mahratta;* August 23, 1940; p 1.

Aadi Shankaracharya's birth anniversary was celebrated in Nasik in May 1936. Though the RSS was not involved in organizing the function in anyway, praises were heaped upon Dr. Hedgewar by the then Shankaracharya of Nasik Vidyashankar Bharati Swami, who was also known as Dr. Kurtakoti for his progressive and enlightened views. Kurtakoti bestowed upon Hedgewar the title of *"Rashtrasenapati"* or the "Commander of the Nation". When this was published in newspapers and Dr. Hedgewar began receiving congratulatory messages,he immediately put anend to the use of such titles for him. He regarded the use of such fancy titles as a display of one's vanity and a self-defeating trait. In his statement he instructed everyone concerned that no title of any kind be conferred upon him, or used for him, nor should it be publicized. Hedgewar's views on this were pretty clear,"The title conferred by Dr. Kurtakoti has no relevance for me.Bearing this in mind please issue instructions that none among us should use this title anywhere, at any time. It is also necessary to end its use in newspapers".

News about the RSS and its programmes and initiatives did receive publicity in local newspapers, but Dr. Hedgewar was careful to prevent the organization and its functionaries from using the press for promoting themselves. In his view, unwarranted publicity and the growth of such tendencies was a symptom of some basic flaws in character in both the individual and the organization. According to him, the greed for publicity and self-promotion was instrumental in the truncation of many an organization, detaching them from their roots and confining them to a mere letter-head or at best, within an office. The following lines are sung in every *shakha* of the RSS:

Name, fame in newspaper
After these, many hanker
Caste aside this cheap desire
For you are a nation-builder
Becoming the brick and stone
The nation's foundation we must make
Worshipping both knowledge and valour
Its responsibility we must undertake.

Whenever this tendency manifested itself in any RSS volunteer knowingly or unknowingly, Dr. Hedgewar used to take immediate action to nip it in the bud. In his letter dated December 11, 1936 to Umakant Apte and Vasantrao Alok, Dr Hedgewar discussed the establishment of the RSS at Delhi, organizational work and related aspectsand finally added:

"News of your arrival at Delhi for RSS work has already been published in the newspapers. Irrespective of whose mistake this is, this does not augur well from the organizational point of view. This kind of publicity raises many obstacles in our mission right from the outset. Therefore, eschewing any promotion of our work, if it is apparent to people, it will be automatically promoted, which is also beneficial to the organization. Please make the people there (at Delhi) understand this and take care that such mistakes are not repeated". [6]

Social Outlook

Competition, rivalry and clashes are not uncommon in public life, nor are they unnatural. What is important is that ideological rivalry should not be devoid of purpose. Dr. Hedgewar was of the view that argument without any objective serves no purpose of the organization. In this regard, he used to quote Samarth Ramdas:"*Tute vaad samvaad to hitkari"*, meaning, "only that debate is fruitful which is constructive and devoid of prejudice".

Dr. Hedgewar was unperturbed by the allegations and counter-allegations upon his organization and its functioning. When he visited Varanasi in 1937, the socialist activists in the city demonstrated against the RSS and labelled Hedgewar a "Fascist crony". Dr Hedgewar was neither perturbed nor agitated at this incident. He only said, "Only time will tell if the Sangh is a democratic organization or a fascist one". Such prejudices are rarely quelled by reply or repartee. Hedgewar would simplyignore such trenchant critics. In his letter of October 30, 1937 to Kashinathrao Limaye, he wrote:

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6 *Dr Hedgewar: PatraroopVyaktiDarshan;* Editor N.D. Palkar, Archana Prakashan, Indore; 1989; p 74.

"A day before I reached Varanasi, some students of the (Banaras) Hindu University had published a pamphlet and distributed it. They thought this pamphlet would provoke us and create hindrance in our work. As soon as I reached Varanasi our *Swayamsevak* showed me the pamphlet. In keeping with our policy, I asked them to ignore it. My suggestion was much appreciated by everyone".

Dr Hedgewar offered the same advice to all in the RSS. Even as the Sangh grew and attained wider renown, the press and political circles would indulge in their own fanciful inferences about it. Many newspapers in Maharashtra like the *Navyug, Mathrubhumi* and *Vande Mataram* began publishing concocted news stories and write-ups about the RSS. For example, on August 11, 1938 a newspaper in western Maharashtra carried the false news that "the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh had called for a public meeting in Chanda to boycott a meeting of the Congress working Committee to be held there". Dr. Hedgewar would naturally advise his *swayamsevaks* to ignore such reports. In his letter to Kashinathrao Limaye on November 12, 1937, he said, "No RSS worker should get involved in replying to or refuting allegations or criticisms against Sangh, either in public meetings or newspapers." In the same letter Dr. Hedgewar further wrote, "News reports published against Sangh from your part of the province are actually a source of entertainment for us. We are not affected in the least by this kind of ideological dust kicked up on us".

Dr. Hedgewar however, did not allow the bitterness generated from this ideological struggle to creep into social and day-to-day life. It was because of this that his personal relations with Rambhau Ruhikar, leader of the Forward Bloc in the Central Provinces, always remained friendly. There are a dozen such examples. Hedgewar firmly believed that ideological differences should not cast their shadow on one's social or personal relations. This was an inalienable part of his character. Karmvir Pathak, a nationalist leader of Central Provinces who was a fellow jail inmate of Dr. Hedgewar during the Non-cooperation Movement has said, "I used to keep distance from Doctorji (Hedgewar) because of differences in opinion, but he always maintained his affection for

me. He never allowed differences to become so sharp as to threaten the friendship".

Hedgewar also urged the Sangh's *swayam sevaks* to counter the opposition from the Congress and Socialists in a polite manner. Those opposed to the ideology of RSS and or differing with its point of view were often invited to the Sangh's public functions as guest speakers. Balaji Huddar, the Sangh's first-ever *Sarkaryavah* (general secretary), who later left the RSS to pursue the communist path, was invited to the RSS *shakha* as well as its training programmes (Officer Training Course or OTC). Similarly, the founder of the (Congress) Seva Dal, N.H. Hardikar was also invited by Dr Hedgewar to an RSS training camp.

Rare are those who do not let personal differences become an impediment in the path of contribution to social or national causes. In October, 1928 a statue of Lokmanya Tilak was unveiled at Nagpur. The function was organized by Morubhau Bhayankar a Congress leader of the Central Provinces. Morubhau believed Dr. Hedgewar to be a supporter of his rival Dr. B.S. Moonje. Hedegwar, therefore, was not invited to this function. But for an individual who had quelled his pride right from his very early days, such pettiness held no meaning at all. For Dr Hedgewar, the unveiling of Tilak's statue was an important occasion and he attended the event along with *swayamsevaks* uninvited. The RSS also gave Congress leader Dr. Ansari a ceremonial guard of honour.

Another example stands out even more strikingly. Swatantryaveer Savarkar toured the Vidarbha region in 1937. Dr. Hedgwar accompanied him and tried to make it a success. Upon the conclusion of the tour, Savarkar addressed a public meeting where he heaped praises upon the RSS for its work and upon reaching his residence, asked Hedgewar, "should I become an RSS *swayamsevak*as well?" To this Dr. Hedgewar replied, "You have appreciated the RSS for its work, which is more than sufficient. I wish that this affection should be sustained".

Savarkar toured Nagpur again in 1938, when the RSS was holding one of its camps. Its *swayamsevaks* contributed significantly to ensure the success of Savarkar's public

programmes. His programme at the Nagpur University was a remarkable success. Talking about his Nagpur sojourn, news papers remarked, "He came, he saw and he conquered". Yet, while addressing *swayamsevaks* at the RSS camp, Savarkar did not let go the opportunity to criticize them. He said, "What is the use of brandishing *lathis* and spears, or marching past in parades? One has to work in society to bring about awakening." *Swayamsevaks* of course felt snubbed, but Dr. Hedgewar showed no reaction. Only the positive essence of Savarkar's speech at this RSS training camp was sent to the newspapers.

To assuage the feelings of his *swayamsevaks* hurt by Savarkar's observations and to refocus their attention on the organization's basic function, Dr. Hedgewar's renowned "*Trayodash Vaarshik Singhaavalokan*" (13th annual assessment) took place, wherein he presented detailed information about the work and progress of the RSS since its inception. Veer Savarkar's caustic remarks about the Sangh speech delivered at the RSS training camp were omitted. Savarkar too did not fail to take note of this.

Next year Dr. Hedgewar was to address *swayamsevaks* during the Sangh's OTC at Pune. Veer Savarkar too reached Pune from Mumbai. His colleagues from Hindu Mahasabha, who had come to receive him at the railway station, asked him where he intended to proceed, to which Savarkar replied that he would like to go to the RSS camp. When his colleagues told him that nobody from the RSS had come to receive him, he said, "Do I need anyone to escort me to my home?" and proceeded to the Sangh's camp. When Dr. Hedgewar came to know of this, he was highly pleased. He said to his *swayamsevaks*, "We are fortunate today that Tatyarao Savarkar is amongst us. I request him to provide us his guidance."

What Savarkar said in his speech was a testimony to how Dr. Hedgewar could win over people with his gentle behaviour. Savarkar said, "Our work is like a heavy downpour that causes a flood-like situation for a while till it rains; as soon as the rain stops the water recedes. But Dr. Hedegwar's work is like that of a farmer

who channelizes the flood water to irrigate his fields. You should follow only Dr. Hedgewar's path". [7]

Dr. Hedgewar was restrained in the choice of his words and his behaviour in public life. He quoted the following sayings of Samarth Ramdas' *Dasbodh*, which he (Hedgewar) he had written in his diary in 1930:

"Do as you say; do first; talk later."
"Talking without doing is as futile as the barking of a dog."
One should enter an abode (begin any work) only after carefully examining it."
"There is no fruit without labour; no kingdom without endeavour; nothing can be gained in this world without effort."

Rituals and Practices

Dr. Hedgewar wished for the constant integration of liberal and reformist tendencies in the Hindu way of life. He was a proponent of an individual's freedom to choose his path, but was of the view that the sway of ritualism was an obstacle to society's progress. Keshav Hedgewar's first and constantly strident opposition from the citadel of ritualism came from his own family. Elder brother Sitaram Pant had unshakeable faith in the caste system and the rituals of the Hindu faith. On many occasions, differences in opinion let to sharp exchanges of words between the brothers. Yet, these differences of opinion in no way diminished their mutual regard and affection. At times, both the brothers would make do with the same pair of spectacles.

Hedegwar believed that everyone had a right to put forth their views, but attempts to impose one's views on others dissipates society's creative energies. One should not commit the mistake of regarding one's ideas or views to be the ideas and views of the entire society. He used to narrate a very interesting story in this regard:

"A king once asked his barber about the conditions in his kingdom. The barber replied that everybody led a comfortable life

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7 The author's interview with K.S. Sudarshan; December 28, 2002.

and everyone had accumulated about eight to ten *tolas* (an old measure) of gold. The king was taken aback to hear of this, especially as his kingdom had been in the grip of a drought-like situation for the past few years. He asked his minister to ascertain the truth. The minister came to know through his spies that it was the barber that had accumulated about a sizeable amount of gold. Acting on royal orders, the spies made off with the barber's gold. The next time when the king visited him for a shave and put the same question, the barber ruefully complained of the dire conditions in the kingdom, saying that theft was rampant everywhere!"

An idol of Hanuman used to be apart of Sangh *shakhas* in its early days. The idol was then removed as followers of the Arya Samaj did not believe in idol-worship. Similarly, the practice of declaring "Samarth Ramdas ki Jai" too was discontinued as it was felt that Ramdas may not be as acceptable outside Maharashtra. The RSS never imposed any particular cultural practice or tradition on its *swayamsevak.*

Dr. Hedgewar was himself a believer but was no regular temple-goer. A friend of his, Prahlad Pant Phadnavis once remarked, "In all these years, you haven't performed any ritual or puja." To this, Dr. Hedgewar, whose focus was firmly on his life's karma, replied, "What you sayis true, but even if I were made to stand before *Yamraj* (the Deity of Death and Justice), he wouldn't be able to call me to account. I haven't done anything for myself in life".

In public life, the work done with a pure mind and sincere heart is the truest worship and Dr. Hedgewar was a true worshipper of the divine that was manifest to him in the form of society and nation. He wrote in his dairy on March 4, 1929, about Samarth Ramdas. "Samarth desired nothing for himself. Well aware that the pride of being a doer of great things would easily engulf him, he chose to spend his life for the betterment of his fellow human beings and his self-realization".

Dr. Hedgewar's economic condition remained the same as it was when his parents had passed away. Like Samarth Ramdas,

Hedgewar too spent his entire life in the betterment of the nation. It was this supreme sacrifice on Dr. Hedgewar's part that people started regarding him to be an incarnation of Samrath Ramdas.

However, this popular perception could not gain much belief as Hedgewar was opposed to the propagation of any such belief. He was ever conscious of the propensity for its misuse. Dr Hedgewar was also opposed to the depiction of Chhatrapati Shivaji as the re-incarnation of Lord Shiva and Lokmanya Tilakas the divine incarnate, making his opposition public. Commenting on this tendency, he said, "Putting great individuals in the category of gods and goddesses is the depth of cravenness. No sooner do we perceive such beings, we rush to install them in temples and shrines. There, we worship them with all devotion, but stay clear of imbibing their good qualities. We Hindus have religiously avoided our responsibilities".

Hedgewar was not against worship per se, but believed that mere worship devoid of any sincerity and action was an empty ritual. He counted those Hindus who merely read the scriptures religiously, but kept aloof from their own society among those responsible for the downfall of Hindu society. Criticizing such meaningless ritualism, Dr. Hedgewar remarked, "Listening to the speeches of politicians one would think that India is great and immortal. Is it truly so? It is impossible to make India immortal without any worthwhile effort. Without effort, one cannot even run one's household, and here we are talking about running a nation".

Stressing the importance of work he had said, "The root of the achievement of any result is the effort one puts in for it. Can there be any gain, anything without effort? To those souls who claim that they shall attain success merely because they pray to the Almighty, I earnestly ask them to show me one instance where a hundred rupees had landed on their feet only as a result of their prayers".

Dr. Hedgewar incessantly strode the path of action. A person once wished to read his palm when he was serving his jail term. Dr. Hedgewar simply laughed it off. His favourite phrase was "*Swayameva Mrigendrata*", meaning lion-like character wasnot

reliant on anything else. Fatalism is another name for inaction. The adage, "God helps those who help themselves" is for those who stay firm on the path of action. Applying this to the Hindu society deeply divided along the lines of caste, community, hierarchy, individualism and other divisive tendencies, Dr Hedgewar gave vent to his frustration and ire, saying,

> "Why should God help us? Why should He pity us? What are we doing to help ourselves that He should rush to our rescue? We are doing nothing to help ourselves. Nothing at all. The Lord has said in the Gita that He will appear for the protection of the good. But who are those that can be called good? God incarnates to destroy those who neither care about their society or nation, nor their religion and tradition. They can see nothing their personal interests. One can find people full of individualistic vices in today's Hindu society, who truly qualify to be called evil. The good are those who are concerned about dharma, nation and welfare of fellow human beings and are always ready for sacrifice for the sake of the nation".

On the issue of personal behaviour, religious traditions and social consciousness, Dr. Hedgewar's views were notable for their clarity and progressiveness. He did not look towards the West for ideology. He considered the cleansing of individual character necessary for social reform and uplift. Hedgewar was no fatalist, but was certainly an optimist. In a letter to Babarao (Ganesh) Savarkar, he had written, "Wait, watch, pray and hope". Similarly, his outlook towards life always reflected positive thinking. Once, when he saw an inscription on a photograph that said, "Teach me how to die", Hedgewar immediately erased those lines and wrote instead "Teach me how to live".

Progressive Outlook

The onerous task of Hindu organization was defined by Dr Hedgewar by two phrases, which have become its definitive adjectives. First Sangh work is divine work and second Sangh work is national work. In other words, Dr Hedgewar's concept of a Hindu organization encompasses two aspects first; the objective of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's endeavour was to strengthen the nation and dedication to it was akin to spiritual awakening and the quest thereof and second; the defining of Hindu organization by him differed fundamentally from that by Hindu political organizations that had come into being prior to the Sangh. The institutionalization of Hindu work as national work has been the Sangh's fundamental credo. It was Dr Hedgewar's firm belief that instilling cultural values in people and awakening a sense of togetherness in them and thereby shaping the national character was a spiritual task.

The objectives of Hindu organizations or parties that had come into existence before the RSS were rather singular. While some among them like the Jati-Pati Todak Mandal (caste-eschewing group) were focused on social reform and the revival of religious consciousness among Hindus, parties like the Hindu Mahasabha believed in the development of Hindu political consciousness. While the first category of organizations considered that Hindu political consciousness would flow from their social and religious awakening, the latter believed social equity to be the prerequisite of political equality and potency. The worldview of the RSS, though, was all-encompassing. While Dr Hedgewar no doubt talked of organizing the Hindus, the focus of his concept of Hindu consciousness was the individual rather than the community. His aim was to inculcate a new cultural consciousness in every Hindu. It was such a Hindu who as an

intrinsic part of the nation could perceive social, cultural and other aspects in their entirety. This was why the RSS, though seemingly similar to other Hindu organizations in outward appearance, exercises far greater influence on social life. Its ever expanding social base is verily the manifest form of Dr Hedgewar's concept of a constructive national Hindu way of life.

Alluding to the goal of a Hindu organization, Dr Hedgewar, speaking at the RSS annual camp at Poona in May 1940 had said: "We must today thoroughly grasp the fact that India is one nation and the Hindus are one society. We are all part of it and every organ of society exists for the nation. All organs of this gigantic national edifice must work in order to make it complete". [1]

Rather than viewing national consciousness through the prism of communal consciousness or anti-imperialist sentiment, Dr Hedgewar looked at India's national consciousness as a positive and permanent force emanating from the nation's historic culture and society. The foundation of a strong nation lies in the love people have for it and their willingness to forsake their all for the protection of its honour, not arms or military might. In his presidential address to the Maharashtra Hindu Yuvak Parishad on April 30, 1938, Hedgewar said, "It is often said that we lack weapons and education. What then should we do? We lost our freedom precisely because we were weak. Our present weakness has led to a serious loss of confidence amongst us. The sole reason for this weakness is the lack of group consciousness and organization among us. Our existence must resonate with the happenings of the nation. Only one who has become one with the nation is its true servant". [2] Dr Hedgewar's outlook on the communal question of the day was based on this very national view of his.

Fissiparous Mentality

Hedgewar saw that the politics of communalism and religion was a medium to weaken the nation. Writing in the *Swatantrya,* he sharply attacked the creeping tendency in the country's politics of

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1 *Kaal;* June 23, 1940.
2 *Kesari;* July 2, 1940; p 5.

compromising with such elements. "Ever since the struggle for Swarajya (freedom) began, the gulf between Hindus and Muslims has only grown. The country's political leaders have made several unsuccessful attempts to lessen this mutual distrust. They have then cobbled the Bengal Agreement, on the basis of give and take. What does this agreement entail? Enlisting the cooperation of Muslims by granting them special privileges? One can gauge the perniciousness of this situation only when one delves deeper into the implications of such an agreement. Is freedom supposed to be only for Hindus? It is an issue that concerns all people of the country. Why then should the Muslims lay down pre-conditions of being granted special privileges for participating in the freedom movement?" [3]

Hedgewar believed that the organization of Hindus on the basis of nationalism would itself put an end to anti-national and communal tendencies. He had founded the Rashtriya Utsav Mandal in Nagpur in 1919. This body would take active part in Hindu festivals to spread nationalist consciousness. The body's purpose was "to awaken the spirit of nationalism in people to make them rise above the narrow feelings of caste or community". The Mandal achieved notable success in curbing anti-Muslim slogans during Hindu festivals. A working committee of seven individuals helped Dr Hedgewar in this work. [4]

Muslims used to raise objections at the time of the immersion of the idols of Lord Ganesh during the Ganesh festival in the Central Provinces. This bickering often used to flare up in riots. When riots broke out in 1923 over this, the Congress committee of the province formed a sub-committee to work out a peaceful resolution to this conflict, comprising Dr Hedgewar, Dr Moonje, Dr Paranjpe and G.A. Ogale. A Khilafat subcommittee was also set up which had Maifasal Kabir, Abid Ali, Dr Hedgewar, Dr M.R. Cholkar and Vishwanathrao Kelkar among others. [5]

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3 *Swatantrya;* June 30, 1924.
4 *Maharashtra;* May 10, 1925, p 5.
5 *Moonje Private Papers;* File No. 13,1923-28, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

The chief reason for the communal problem at Nagpur was religious intransigence and aggressiveness. The colonial administration covertly encouraged Muslim truculence through its policy of appeasing them. The district magistrate of Nagpur issued orders forbidding a procession at Dindi on October 30, 1923. This procession was a normal Hindu custom during October-November as part of their community *bhajan*. Hindus were enraged at this administrative order. A satyagraha was organized at Nagpur in opposition, which is now known as the Dindi Satyagaraha. Thousands of people participated in this agitation from November 1 to 10. They included Raja Lakshmanrao Bhonsale, Dr Cholkar, Dr Moonje, Dr Hedgewar, N.B. Khare and other prominent citizens. About two hundred and fifty people courted arrest. Dr Hedgewar took part in this satyagraha on 8th November.[6] The local administration had to finally yield and constituted a committee on 12th November 1923 to restore peace. This committee included Dr Hedgewar too. Yet, there was no let-up in Hindu-Muslim riots. That year, November alone saw two riots break out. It was Hedgewar's boldness that prevented the riot of November 19 from spreading further.[7]

There was a quarrel of a similar kind at Poona in 1937. Acceding to Muslim demands, the government banned the ringing of bells at the city's Sonyamaruti Mandir from April 24 to May 14. The beating of drums or trumpets too was banned. Hedgewar was upset at the administration policy of appeasement and growing Muslim intolerance. A Sangh training camp was in progress at Poona then. Local Hindu leaders expected the RSS to play a leading part in the satyagraha against this ban, Dr Hedgewar, however, held the view that such incidents continued to happen only because Hindu society would awake from its slumber only when danger threatened. The need therefore, was for society to remain ever alert. Local Hindu leaders failed to grasp his actual vision. Hedgewar, of course, did not ignore this latest incident and joined the satyagraha on May 13 after completing the Sangh training camp, and also

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6 *Maharashtra;* November 17, 1923; p 2.
7 *Maharashtra;* November 21, 1923; p 4.

braved arrest for his role. He was later released, with N.B. Abhyankar appearing in court in his stead, which the court permitted. The court pronounced its judgment on May 17 and imposed a fine of Rs.25 on Dr Hedgewar. He was perturbed at this incident, which he considered to be anathema to the nation's traditions. He was firm in his conviction that the mere existence of a strong, organized and united Hindu society was sufficient to quell both such recalcitrant mentality, as well as the conspiracies of any hostile administration.

This conviction of Dr Hedgewar was based on his own experience as well as assessment of social realities. He said, "The Sangh harbours no malice towards anyone. It is only engaged in the task of organizing Hindus. Its purpose is to safeguard the nation and preserve its *dharma* and culture. I am surprised when I hear it being dubbed as communal". [8] Hedgewar firmly believed that it was the widespread disunity and narrow-mindedness in Hindu society that encouraged communal forces to disrespect the country's cultural way of life and its tradition of religious tolerance. This was the reason Hindus continued to face obstruction to their religious processions, worship of the cow and also the problem of religious conversion. Dr Hedgewar proceeded with his chosen mission of organizing Hindus in keeping with his own worldview. He did not for once compromise on his ideals or chosen path simply to satisfy the limited thinking of local Hindu leaders or live up to their expectations from the RSS.

The Sangh's role in the Central Provinces in 1926-27 is an example of this. Dr Hedgewar played a positive role in the environment of those days, which had become toxic with communalism. His credibility too, was further enhanced. It was his intervention that twice prevented the outbreak of riots over immersion of Ganesh idols in September 1926. [9] A year later, bloody riots erupted at Nagpur in September 1927, in which 20 people were killed and 131 others were injured. The loss incurred in these riots was over Rs. 50,000 per day. The government's

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8 *Kesari;* April 3, 1933.

9 *Moonje Papers Diary;* April 7 and September 22, 1926.

fortnightly report that diagnosed the reasons for the outbreak of this communal fracas said, "The immediate provocation for this riot was a procession taken out by the Muslims. The purpose of this procession was to demonstrate that processions were not a monopoly of Hindus alone. Though a minority in Nagpur, Muslims here consider themselves more active and aggressive". [10] On this occasion, local Hindu leaders had hoped that RSS *swayam sevaks* would display aggression to counter Muslim hooliganism. Dr Hedgewar did deploy his *swayam sevaks* at sensitive spots to prevent riots. As a result of his pro-activeness, the riots in the city could be quickly brought under control.

Dr Hedgewar also made use of *swayam sevaks* in 1926 to curb the rampant indiscipline among Hindus and the utter lack or order during Hindu religious festivities. Two *swayam sevaks* were deputed to help organize the *Ramnavami* festival at Ramtek in an orderly way. Anti-social elements among both Hindu and Muslim communities were angered at this. It was natural for communal elements in Nagpur and its vicinity to be irked at the growth of such a disciplined Hindu organization under the tutelage of Dr Hedgewar. They realized, and rightly so, that it was no longer possible to provoke, attack or plunder Hindus' religious festivals or occasions. It was during this period that Swami Shraddhanand was murdered, which turned the atmosphere in the Central Provinces incendiary. Dr Hedgewar also received an anonymous threat. It read: "You have provoked the Muslims of Ramtek. You shall be cut into pieces within a year". [11]

Hedgewar received another letter of this kind on June 4. There were also rumours of a possible attack on him at Nagpur. However, he was neither perturbed nor angered, and also did not allow his *swayam sevaks* to turn violent. He merely ignored them and did not even report the matter to the police. It was Dr Moonje who formally lodged a complaint with the police. [12]

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10 *Fortnightly Report of the Central Provinces in the first half of September;* 32/27 Para (1).
11 *Maharashtra;* May 25, 1927.
12 *Moonje Papers Diary;* May 10, 1927, National Archives of India, New Delhi.

RSS began handling arrangements during the Ganesh festival and also protecting members of the society from undesirable elements. [13] Dr Hedgewar also participated in the conference organized at Calcutta in 1926 to oppose the British government's Communal Award. The RSS organized conferences and demonstrations against it. However, the speeches in these meets focused only on attacking Britain's Divide and Rule Policy, and steered clear of any anti-Muslim sentiment. [14]

One can also gauge Dr Hedgewar's positive thinking from an incident of 1934. In 1932, the government of the Central Provinces had imposed a ban on its employees from joining the RSS. A year later, this ban was extended in its scope to cover the employees of local bodies and teachers too. The second ban could have proven more injurious to the RSS. M.Y. Sharif was the minister for local autonomous bodies, and was notorious for his religious zealotry. Dr Moonje wrote on January 15, 1934: "A Muslim minister targeted the roots of the RSS". Yet, Dr Hedgewar chose to ignore this. He did not mention it in his letters or his meetings with other leaders either. It was owing to Dr Hedgewar's nationalist and positive organizational vision that the expansion of the RSS in the Central Provinces and other parts of the country did not create any communal issue.

In later years, the RSS declared the Muslim League's two-nation principle to be anti-national and also participated in "Anti-Pakistan Day" programmes. Dr Hedgewar considered India to be an ancient nation. His view was that though different sects and communities lived in the nation, it was not an inn "where one could enter and leave as one pleased". [15] He further said that all those who are part of the nation "are the proud inheritors of the legacy of one thought, way of life, one civilization and one tradition". The League's two-nation theory was based on different warring

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13 *Fortnightly Report of the Central Provinces of the second half of September* 1932; F.L/P & J 12/40.

14 *Fortnightly Report of the Central Provinces August* 1934; second part; F.L/P & J 12/62.

15 *Kesari;* July 2, 1939; p 5.

nationalities, with their respective faiths being the basis of their difference and animosity. On the issue of plurality of sects, Dr Hedgewar clearly said that the presence of other (non-Hindu) sects in India has never raised an issue in the country. In his words, "If others are prepared to reside in this country in cordiality and harmony, they can certainly do so. We have not prevented them from doing so and shall not do so, either. The harmonious existence of the Parsi community is ample evidence of the tolerance of Hindus".

Untouchability

Dr Hedgewar regarded the social ills rampant in Hindu society and its divided and feudal mentality to be the root cause of social and national downfall. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar had drawn attention to these ills during the course of the freedom movement. Dr Hedgewar believed that Hindus lacked a cohesive social consciousness. He therefore, did not lay down any condition for entry into the RSS. Yet, entrants coming from different caste backgrounds would shed their caste-consciousness and sense of untouchability after becoming a part of the Sangh's organizational architecture, methodology and spirit of nationalism. This process of change was not reliant on mere propaganda; it was a veritable social revolution that was brought about in the most peaceful way. Indeed, there were innumerable instances where Brahmins and so-called untouchable *swayam sevaks* living, and eating together caused social friction among the families of the more orthodox, but these soon dissolved in the informal cultural flow of the Sangh's organization. Balasaheb Deoras has written in his memoirs that Dr Hedgewar never used to impose the concept of equity under the aegis of discipline. He always believed that this ought to happen of one's own volition in order to be sustainable. Deoras further reveals that during the Sangh's first-ever training camp, when some s*wayam sevaks* displayed hesitation in sitting alongside others of the Mahar caste, they were allowed to sit in another row. All that Dr Hedgewar had said then was, "Our practice is to eat together". Hedgewar's words were enough to make those *swayam sevaks* from conservative families shed their prejudice and sit together the next day.

S.H. Deshpande, writing about his experience of Sangh life has thrown light on its social philosophy thus, "The chief trainer of our *shakha* was a non-Brahmin. But we couldn't guess this as he spoke in Marathi. It was only when I visited his home that I came to know that his name was Sadashiv. His brother Sitaram too was active in the Sangh".[16]

Dr Hedgewar never compromised on the issues of caste or untouchability. He was truly holistic in outlook and attitude. He believed in the equal rights of those who were backward and looked upon as untouchable. It was owing to this firm conviction of his that he and other RSS leaders could openly carry on with their mission in the political and social milieu of the Central Provinces, which in those days were sunk in casteism. Wardha alone had 84 RSS *shakhas* in 1940, of which 70 were held in non-Brahmin areas. [17] Whenever Dr Hedgewar was faced with the obscurantist and status quo elements, he would unhesitatingly stand up to them. The RSS had organized a function in August 1937 at Ratnagiri in Maharashtra. When the temple's orthodox priests raised objections to the entry of Harijan *swayam sevaks*, Hedgewar rebuked them harshly and altered the venue of his programme. Mahadev Shastri Divekar wrote in the *Kesari*, "There is no discrimination in the Sangh between Brahmins, non-Brahmins and untouchables. They play, eat and salute the flag together". [18]

Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar too visited an RSS camp at Poona in 1938. He expressed surprise at seeing Mahar *swayam sevaks* being treated equally, and with respect. "I have for the first time seen the erasing of untouchability in this manner". Mahatma Gandhi too, had made a similar comment after his visit to the Sangh's Wardha camp in 1934.

Dr Hedgewar respected Dr Ambedkar and this was the reason for including his name in the RSS pantheon of those to be mentioned early morning. Comparing Dr Hedgewar and Dr

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16 H.S. Deshpande; *My Days in the RSS;* Quest, Bombay; August 1975; p 19
17 *Kesari;* July 24, 1940.
18 *Kesari;* July 5, 1940; p 13.

Ambedkar, K.C. Sudarshan (later *Sarsangchalak*) has written, "The revolution Dr Ambedkar desired in Hindu society was also the goal of Dr Hedgewar. The organized social life that Dr Hedgewar wished for, free of caste hierarchy and feelings of untouchability was also the aim of Dr Ambedkar". [19]

Sudarshan further writes, "Dr Ambedkar mounted an assault on prevalent social orthodoxy and its pernicious practices, and chose politics as his medium, which was actually alien to his nature, in his endeavour to ensure social equality and respect for his people. Dr Hedgewar, on the other hand, preferred the path of resuscitation of noble and enlightened Hindu values based on all that was good, sublime and beneficial in our ancient heritage, laying stress on expanding the horizon of the mind, training it to be all inclusive and free of constriction. It is for this reason that he chose to keep aloof from politics".

Dr Hedgewar opposed the practice of untouchability in social life. He was one of the organizers of a joint meal with people from the so-called untouchable castes at Poona's New English High School. Addressing the students of this school on October 23, 1932, Hedgewar called upon its students to boldly stand up to the evil of untouchability . [20]

Sensitive Personality

The sensitive personality of Dr Hedgewar is reflected in his social philosophy. He never gave a thought to his personal hardship or the means to alleviate them, thoroughly immersing himself in his social and national cause. During his days in Calcutta, he worked round-the-clock with the Ramakrishna Mission team to assist victims of a flood in the Damodar River. He felt truly happy at serving revolutionaries in their old age. He personally helped Shyam Sundar Chakravarty.. When an old revolutionary associate Bhauji Kavre fell ill, he stayed with Hedgewar at his village for three days.

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19 K.C. Sudarshan; "Samaj Rog ke Nidankarta Do Doctor"; *Panchajanya;* October 23, 1988; pp 9-10.
20 *Hitvada;* October 27, 1932.

Hedgewar was also quite concerned about the plight of orphaned children. He would question, "Why do we have to open orphanages? Why cannot we bring about a situation wherein no child is forced to become an orphan?" Having lost his parents in his childhood; Dr Hedgewar very well understood the mental trauma children who lose their parents at an early age have to endure. He was therefore a proponent of making social life a familial one.

Orphanages, in his view, were at best a stop-gap arrangement. Dr Hedgewar agreed to contribute in the management of orphanages at Nagpur, Nasik and Bombay only after he was convinced of their indispensability. He established an orphans' educational institution at Nagpur in 1922. About the institution, G.V. Deshmukh wrote, "The institution was free of all social evils like untouchability and casteism. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Sir Shankaran Nair, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Lala Lajpat Rai came to visit this place, after which they became admirers of Dr Hedgewar. He however, forbade Europeans from doing service at Nagpur. [21] Hedgewar was also closely associated with the orphans' educational institution at Nasik.[22]

Women's Empowerment

Dr Hedgewar was a crusader against the feudal and orthodox treatment meted out to women in Indian society. He looked upon women not as objects of pity, but entitled to the same rights and respect as men are. The measures he adopted in his own life could have been possible only for a radical reformist. Hedgewar was no doubt opposed to child marriage and a supporter of widow remarriage, but he was also against "unmatched marriages". The society of his days was in the grip of the obnoxious custom of forcibly marrying off young women to men who were much older to them in age. Once, when he got to hear of such a wedding, Hedgewar marched to the venue with his associates and forcibly prevented that marriage from taking place, and also got the girl

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21 *Kaalsamudrateel Ratne;* Veena Prakashan, Nagpur; p 152-53.
22 *Kesari;* January 13, 1939.

married to another boy close to her in age. Eminent Marathi novelist Gajanan Madkholkar has in his autobiography lifted the veil on a mystery. It was due to Dr Hedgewar's efforts that impediments in his own marriage to a lady of his choice were removed. Hedgewar also objected to the use of the term "beloved" for women and laid stress on the term "*Devi*" (goddess) for them.

Dr Hedgewar also endorsed public role and responsibility for the fairer gender. He practiced what he believed in and preached; women speakers would be invited to address RSS *shakhas* and camps. The Akhil Bharatiya Mahila Parishad supported the Sangh's outlook on social reform. Its president Rajkumari Amrit Kunwar and other members who included the vice-chairperson of the provincial legislative council Anasuyabai Kale, visited the RSS camp at Nagpur on December 28, 1937. [23] This was not an isolated incident. Women political leaders and social activists had been invited to the Sangh's programmes on earlier occasions too. Congress leader Kamalabai spoke at the Sangh's Konkan *shakha* on November 21, 1938. Parvatibai Sarchitnavis was the chief guest on December 9, 1934 at the annual ceremony at the RSS *shakha* at Nagpur. Ramabai Tambe, nominated member of the Central Provinces Legislative Assembly, was an admirer of the RSS.

Dr Hedgewar was alive to the social, political and cultural role of women. This is evident from the fact that he was the inspiration behind one of the country's oldest institutions, the Rashtra Sevika Samiti. He instilled confidence in women volunteers and inspired them to lay the foundations of a new organization. Two organizations were established in the Central Provinces the Rashtra Sevika Samiti (Wardha) and the Rashtriya Swyamsevika Sangh (Bhandara) in 1935-36. Both organizations merged into one as a result of Dr Hedgewar's efforts. The Samiti undertook the ideological and physical training of women.

Economic Philosophy

Dr Hedgewar did not articulate an economic vision in a great deal of words; yet, his own life and persona, and the methodology

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23 *Maharashtra;* January 2, 1938; p 10.

of the RSS can help us reach a few conclusions. In the 1920 Nagpur session of the Congress, Dr Hedgewar pronounced capitalism to be inhuman in nature and a tool of imperialism. His writings during his days as the editor of the *Swatantrya* throw sufficient light on his economic egalitarianism. Workers in Nagpur's Empress Mill went on a strike in 1924 over the issues of bonus, insurance during their work life and wage raise. The *Swatantrya* openly supported their cause, as a result of which the newspaper stopped getting advertisements. Dr Hedgewar continued to remain an advocate of the workers' agitation against exploitation by capitalists.

Yet, Dr Hedgewar was no proponent of the Marxist doctrine of class war. He considered the division of social activists along the lines of 'isms' to be impractical and unreal. Taking a pot-shot at the supposed division of the Left and Right, Hedgewar commented to labour leader Rambhau Ruikar, "I am a poor capitalist, while you are a rich proletarian". The occasion was a lecture by a labour leader, to which Ruikar had invited Dr Hedgewar too. Entry to the lecture was conditional on the purchase of a ticket. Dr Hedgewar's comment was in response to Ruikar's query afterwards as to why Hedgewar did not turn up.

Dr Hedgewar kept his own life free of wants. Economic prosperity to him did not mean a successful and secure life. He travelled by third class throughout his life. His increasing fame and esteem was also a reason for additional economic burden on his own family; yet, Hedgewar lived a life of utter simplicity in his rather dilapidated home. He had to often chop wood for domestic use and at times, there wouldn't be enough milk and sugar even for a cup of tea.

It is not uncommon for social activists to acquire the patronage or protection of the rich, along with a desire to spread their name far and wide. Dr Hedgewar was successful in keeping himself free of such a situation, which denotes his rare and exemplary character. Raja Lakshmanrao Bhonsale, through his private secretary Vasudev Shastri, offered him a plot of land which Hedgewar promptly turned down. Nanasaheb Talatule of Sindi was a wealthy man, who knew Dr Hedgewar since his days as a revolutionary. In 1926, he along with Appaji Joshi met Hedgewar

in an attempt to pressurize him to agree to end his economic burden. Talatule told Hedgewar, "Your constant engagement in social causes has left you no time to tend to your home, as a result of which economic worries always follow you like a shadow". To this, Dr Hedgewar replied as a matter of fact, "I shall ask for help from you when I need it. As of now, there isn't any need".

Hedgewar's state of penury continued as before for a further eight years. His sister-in-law Ramabai had difficulty in even running the household. This was known only as late as 1935 when his close friend Vishwanathrao Kelkar felt that Hedgewar could not serve him even a cup of tea despite inviting him (Kelkar) to his home, as there weren't enough ingredients. Kelkar asked Guru Golwalkar why they couldn't tend to their leader. Golwalkar's reply was telling, "Can Shivratri *satiate Ekadashi* (the eleventh day of the calendar on which observing a complete fast is considered auspicious in Hindu tradition)?" In other words, financial respite or betterment held absolutely no meaning for one who had totally given himself up for the national cause.

From 1935 onwards, *swayam sevaks* began donating about five to six hundred rupees annually to Dr Hedgewar out of respect for him, but he would promptly offer this sum of money as *guru dakshina* to the RSS. Things reached a stage when one of the walls of his house collapsed. It was then that Nagpur's *swayam sevaks* collected some money to offer him for the repair of his house. The *Kesari's* editorial says that the lack of money never made Hedgewar despair. [24]

Hedgewar was also careful not to allow anyone else's poverty become an object of ridicule. It was for this reason that he broke his resolve of not having tea when he visited a poor *swayam sevak*'s home. Explaining his reasons for doing so, Hedgewar said, "What else does that *swayam sevak* have to welcome any visitor? If we decline even this, his feelings will be immeasurably hurt".

The RSS was unmistakably influenced by this persona and outlook of its founder. Hedgewar had seen the effects of the display

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24 *Kesari;* June 25, 1940.

and use of wealth on many an organization in social and political life. He based the Sangh on purely human energy and enterprise, not on the crutches of the wealthy in society. Hedgewar also began the tradition of *guru dakshina* in it from 1928 onwards, a practice that continues till today wherein all *swayam sevaks* offer some token monetary contribution according to their capacity to the saffron flag once a year. During the early years, luminaries from renowned industrialist G.D. Birla to scholar-educationist Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, who were influenced by the Sangh's ideology, freely offered all monetary help, but Dr Hedgewar, though acknowledging his gratitude, politely declined these offers. On the one hand, the RSS faced a perennial shortage of funds needed to send its *swayam sevaks* and *pracharaks* to other provinces; while on the other hand, there was no dearth of donors who were eager to donate to it. But Dr Hedgewar's Sangh flowered and succeeded amidst want, mirroring the personal life of its founder. In fact, the first-ever *guru dakshina* of the RSS yielded Rs. 84 and some paise! No wonder, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya, addressing the *swayam sevaks* at Nagpur had remarked, "Other organizations have huge buildings and their coffers are full of money, but I am truly happy that the Sangh has a vast treasure of human capital". [25]

Dr Hedgewar also kept meticulous account of the money received in the form of guru dakshina and from other donors. Public money was very precious to him. His economic outlook undoubtedly shaped the character of the RSS, drawing people from the middle and lower middle classes to it. He rejected class struggle but stood firmly for the democratic rights and justice for the workers. It was his principled positioning on labour movement inspired the Sangh to step into labour movement in the 50's. Presently RSS commands the biggest labour organisation in India , i.e., Bhartiya Majdoor Sangh (BMS) founded by Dattpant Thengadi.

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25 *Maharashtra;* July 25, 1929.

Importance of Being Hedgewar

The essence of the life of an individual is not measured in the length of his years but his achievements for humanity. Each individual sets forth on his path of action in accordance with his capability, vision and creativity. Such individuals make their mark in the annals of history when they exert their influence on society, nation and human civilization through their persona and deeds. Generations evaluate him and also draw inspiration from him. Dr Hedgewar too, lent a new ideological and organizational expression to the Indian nation, its civilization, culture and identity through his actions, thoughts and values. RSS is an essence of his life.

Dr Hedgewar strove to carry ideology, organization and idealism through his mind and body. Both ideology and idealism have an important role in one's life. Ideology is the soul while idealism is its physical frame. It is with the idealism that principles acquire a definite shape and become effective. Mere idealism without an abiding ideology is ultimately limited to one's personal life. Dr Hedgewar's life was based on ideological consciousness and values of idealism. That was why his ideology and work, though resembling those of contemporary Hindu organizations and leaders, was qualitatively different. The terms "Hindu Rashtra", "Hindu organizations" and "social harmony" were used by the Hindu Mahasabha and other organizations too, but Dr Hedgewar's vision was focused on resuscitating the cultural identity of the nation. It was this mission that was lent eloquent expression through the historic and cultural term "Hindu Rashtra". His aim was to impart an enduring and transcendent sense of self to nationalism.

It was this resolve and quest with which Dr. Hedgewar went about the arduous and complex task of building an organization.

The individual is the most important and vibrant element of all the constructs of a nation. The individual is the carrier of the nation's heritage, identity, history and culture. Dr. Hedgewar thus created an army of Hedgewars through his effective interweaving of ideology and idealism. He was consumed in this mighty quest when it barely crossed fifty one years of age. Ram Gosavi said in his homage to Dr. Hedgewar:

> "Dr. Hedgewar was great because of the salient features of his character. Greatness lies not in physical strength but in moral power, which Dr Hedgewar had in abundance. His selfless life had no parallel. He never constructed even a house for himself. The entire country was his home. He was one who shunned publicity and fame."

Hedgewar, a true *sanyasi* was firm on the path of his chosen task in life, lived the austere life of a hermit. He had no desire to lead a long life, nor did he ever bother much about his health. To him, the health of the nation and the longevity of his organization were paramount issues. Hedgewar caught pneumonia in 1924; in those days, he was rather busy in Nagpur's public life, organizing games as well as participating in political action. It was in 1932 that he was seriously unwell for the first time. The one-year jail term in 1930 had an adverse affect on his health and he had to spend two months at Dr Hardas' house at Dhantoli recuperating. Yet, this rest was not done seriously. Hedgewar's mind was active as before, dwelling in the nuts and bolts of Sangh. Dr Hardas has said that Dr Hedgewar's indifferent health was due to his ceaseless work.

The work of the RSS consumed Hedgewar's health bit by excruciating bit. From 1935 onwards, he began to suffer from chronic back pain. But he chose to conceal this as he did not want the work and mission to suffer. Hedgewar's backache had become unbearable when he arrived at Sangli in 1935 for a programme. He himself wrote in this regard: "I somehow managed to bear my back pain and tried my best not to let anyone know about it, alighting at the station to accept the greetings of people. I had to proceed straight to the Sangh's place where a parade was to take place. I somehow managed to go through the programme as planned, but my backache only increased as a result of this strain".

Dr Hedgewar had to make a halt at Sangli. Yet, rest was not a word in his lexicon. He would be constantly doing only RSS work even if he had to lie down on bed. *Swayam sevaks* termed his ailment a "speaking illness".

Hedgewar contracted both cough and fever in November 1936. Despite this, he undertook a long tour of ten days of the Katol taluka from November 13 onwards that year. Needless to add, there was no rest or respite for him during the tour, which was as gruelling as his other journeys were. His growing fame meant that he was in much demand. He wrote to his brother Abaji Hedgewar "I began my journey after taking leave of you yesterday. The Sangh's members came to meet wherever there are *shakhas*...and most places do have a Sangh *shakha*, as a result of which I haven't been able to sleep a wink". Normally, Dr Hedgewar would go to sleep only at one or two in the morning and would rise at sunrise. This naturally began to take its toll.

Hedgewar wrote to Balaji Huddar on March 11, 1937, saying, "It is true my health isn't in the shape it ought to be. This is due to no fault of my nature. Considering the sheer magnitude of tasks that lie ahead and the challenges thereof, I must say that even my present state of health is good enough. I have been travelling for the last four months for the Sangh's work, and am unable to get time for rest before two in the morning".

Dr Hedgewar had to travel to Rajgriha in Bihar on December 7, 1939, to avail of natural treatment. He was accompanied by Appaji Joshi and a few other RSS associates. After his return, he spent time at the RSS camp at Poona from May 1 to 15, 1940, returning to Nagpur on May 16. Nagpur was hosting a month-long Sangh *shiksha varg* (training session), which was a very important event. Unfortunately, Dr Hedgewar took ill on the day he had returned, i.e., May 16th. More than his physical pain, it was his inability to be present at the Sangh's camp that caused him real trauma. He repeatedly implored his doctors to let him step out, but they would not permit him. Relenting finally, they allowed him to be present only thrice at the ongoing Sangh camp. His address to the Sangh was an amalgam of indomitable willpower and patriotism. This, alas, was his last speech. Hedgewar could not live

long enough to see his country attain independence from imperial rule, but the miniature form of his dream of a mighty, sublime and eternal Hindu Rashtra he had dreamt in 1925 was present in front of his eyes on that day of June 9, 1940. Hedgewar in his address to all *swayam sewaks* said,

> "Though many of us don't know each other personally, what is it that draws our hearts and minds to each other? It is the ideology of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which is so powerful and effective that even those *swayam sevaks* who do not know each other recognize and respond to each other".

Hedgewar then proceeded to outline the nature of the work of the RSS,

> "You will today return to your respective places. I bid you goodbye with all affection. This is indeed a moment of parting, but not of grief. You are proceeding to your respective places to complete the task you have resolved to. Let each one of you resolve unto himself that as long as there is life, he shall never forget the Sangh. You must never waver in the face of any temptation. Also, do remember that doing the Sangh's work as a matter of mere routine or simply by being present at its location is not true Sangh work. We have to organize this great Hindu nation that spans the Himalayas to the ocean. Our real arena of work lies in the Hindu world that lies outside the Sangh. The Sangh exists not only for its *swayam sevaks*, but also for those outside its purview. To show them the path of the nation's rise is our duty towards them, and this path can only be that of organization".

Fifteen hundred *swayam sevaks* from all over the country had assembled for this annual Nagpur camp. Dr Hedgewar, through his address had made it amply clear that the organization that was replete with uniform, parades, sports and other physical activities was not a paramilitary outfit or a Hindu defence league, but an ideological movement, whose objective is to organize the entire nation to make it a nation with purpose, based on values and

prosperous. Hedgewar did not limit the work of the RSS to state power or authority, the majority, or any particular aspect of the nation, but made the entire nation, its society and its holistic advancement the arena of its endeavour. He believed that the achievement of any single objective must not halt the work of the RSS organization.

After this, Dr Hedgewar's health began falling continuously. Yet, he remained a beacon of hope for everyone even as he lay on what would eventually become his deathbed. Little wonder that two very important national leaders Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerji and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose were drawn to him. They wanted to meet him, seek his guidance and direction and also his assistance. When Dr Mookerji landed in Nagpur on May 21, the latter had a fever of 103 degrees. Dr Mookerji apprised him of the developing situation for the Hindus of Bengal and the increasing threat of Muslim aggression, which also had the tacit support of the state. Mookerji proposed the setting up of a Hindu defence league, to which Dr Hedgewar's response was indicative of the fine balance between his heart, mind and thought. He told Mookerji, "The root cause of the grave situation that has arisen for Hindus in Bengal and Punjab is the disorganized state of our society. Such aggression against the Hindus will continue as long this situation is not permanently altered. Temporary measures born out of immediate necessity, on the spur of the moment, to counter immediate perils will not alter this situation permanently. For this, it is imperative to infuse all Hindus of the country with the feeling of oneness and the spirit of belonging to one nation."

Exactly a month later on June 20, 1940, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose visited Nagpur to see him. All hope of Dr Hedgewar's life had been practically extinguished by then. After lying in the city's Mayo Hospital from June 15 onwards for a complete medical examination, he was shifted to Babasaheb Ghatate's bungalow at Civil Lines. Dr Hedgewar himself knew that his end was very near. On June 15th, he asked Yadavrao Joshi, a *swayam sevak*, "Will you perform the last rites of a departed senior Sangh functionary in a military way?"

Joshi's eyes welled up with tears and he evaded a direct reply. This was a very poignant moment; more filial than the relation between a father and son. Even in his final moments, he was concerned that no unhealthy tradition should get a foothold in the RSS after his death. The Sangh's adherence to military training to its *swayam sevaks* had him concerned that perhaps his last rites would be performed in military style. Hedgewar expressed his opinion on this: "The Sangh is a family, not a formal organization. Therefore, my last rites too should be performed in as simple a manner as is done for any family member who passes away".

Hedgewar's condition worsened on June 20th, but even in those moments, he remained unwavering. For this incomparable visionary of the Hindu nation, his own life or death held no importance. It was the image of the Sangh, the instrument of the nation's elevation, which was firmly embedded in his eyes, mind and soul. On June 20th, seeking some time from his doctors, Hedgewar fell into deep thought and then called Golwalkar and instructed him in the presence of all senior RSS functionaries, "From now on, you must take over the responsibility of the Sangh".

Golwalkar was sunk in grief when he heard these words of the *Sarsanghchalak*. The air was filled with anxiety that rose sharply with each ticking second. Hedgewar's fever suddenly shot up on the night of June 20th, his face reflecting a stern seriousness. Around half-past two in the morning, he lost consciousness and on the morning of June 21, 1940, the founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh breathed his last. It was the day of *Jyeshth Badi Dwiteeya*.

The news of Dr Hedgewar's passing away spread like wildfire. People from all over the Central Provinces and the country began reaching Nagpur. Old and young, men and women lined up to pay their last respects and the procession of visitors continued all day. Even a heavy downpour on June 21 could not deter them in the least.

The funeral procession began its journey at five in the evening, which was joined by thousands of mourners, both men and women. Commenting on this funeral procession, the *Hitvada*

wrote that "this was Nagpur's most memorable funeral procession. Thousands were part of Dr Hedgewar's final journey, in spite of the fact that the skies were literally pouring torrents. Important people of the city were present in this procession, which began at five in the evening. The entire route was strewn with flowers. As the procession made its way ahead, the number of people joining it kept on increasing and it took four hours to reach the grounds of Reshim Bag". [1] Those in the procession included Sant Panchlegaonkar Maharaj, Ganpatrao Buti, Dr Cholkar, Dr Paranjpe, Rambhau Ruikar, Seth Poonamchand, Veer Harkare, Balaji Huddar, Alekar, N.B. Khare, Ogale and all activists of the Congress, socialists, Forward Bloc and the labour movement.

The *Hitvada* in its editorial said that the country wouldn't find a more efficient organizer than Dr Hedgewar. [2]

The Mahratta published from Poona termed Dr Hedgewar "The messiah of the Hindu nation". The paper wrote, "We often use the term 'selfless', but it is Dr Hedgewar's life that actually made it a reality. In his ideals and his selfless life, Dr Hedgewar was like the Maratha saint, warrior and poet Ramdas". [3]

The *Maharashtra* in its editorial compared him to Lokmanya Tilak.[4] The *Kesari* wrote the following about his life and achievements,

> "Humility, which is rarely to be found in politicians, was in abundance in Hedgewar. He sacrificed his family life and a bright personal future for the sake of his nation. The Sangh has now spread from Rawalpindi to Madras and Karachi to Calcutta. Although the RSS is still much smaller compared to the Hindu nation, yet it is the backbone of national unity. It is after understanding its strength and influence that Gandhiji praised it as "India's most organized institution".[5]

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1 *Hitvada;* June 23, 1940; p 1.
2 *Hitvada;* June 23, 1940; "The Late Dr Hedgewar".
3 *The Mahratta;* June 28, 1940.
4 *Maharashtra;* 23 June 1940
5 *Kesari;* June 25, 1940; p 8.

Another Marathi newspaper the *Kaal* called Dr Hedgewar's life "A ceaseless endeavour for India's freedom". [6]

The extent of Dr Hedgewar's popularity can be gauged by the fact that "Dr Hedgewar Day" was celebrated in almost all villages and towns of the Central Provinces and Maharashtra, schools and colleges, local administrative bodies and elected councils, in which tributes were paid to him. In Bombay's Shivaji Nagar, in a condolence meeting on June 22, 1940, Harijan workers called Dr Hedgewar a messiah who infused self-confidence in Harijans.[7] Even the *Mathrubhumi*, a newspaper highly critical of the RSS, praised him; its editor Pramila Oak wrote, "One may differ with his (Dr Hedgewar's) views, but one cannot escape admiring his capacity to make sacrifices, unshakeable resolve and rare organizational capabilities. He dedicated his entire life to the service of society". [8]

Hedgewar bequeathed these very qualities of greatness, ideological purity and dedication to the nation to his organization and followers. His life has today become the benchmark for national consciousness, spotless public life, patriotism and public good. Death may have taken him away from his mortal frame, but Dr Hedgewar's thoughts and convictions have acquired shape in the form of the organization and strength of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, and have become an inalienable part of our social and national life.

The relevance of the life and ideas of any visionary is inherent in his ability to influence future generations and national life of the times that follow him. The evaluation of such individuals forever remains a work in progress; it is only the course of history that can lend it any measure of totality and conclusiveness. Beyond doubt, Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar belongs to the pantheon of such epoch-making individuals. V D Savarkar's homage to him is therefore, very telling and still relevant, "Hedgewar is dead long live Hedgewar"

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6 *Kaal;* June 24, 1940.
7 *Kaal;* July 11, 1940.
8 *Matrubhumi;* June 25, 1940; p 6.

Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar was a devoted exponent of Indian culture. He was at once a dedicated, righteous nationalist and a man of free will. In founding the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, he also ensured that the slumbering masses of the country were enlightened. This book not only sums up life and times of the illustrious freedom fighter but also brings to the fore hither to unknown facets of his life.

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PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION & BROADCASTING
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

Price : ₹ 180.00

ISBN - 978 - 81- 230 - 1986 - 4

BMI - ENG - OP - 068 -2014-15